

EVERY "BOY SCOUT" SHOULD READ THIS

2d AMERICAN WEEKLY INDIAN

BY COLONEL SPENCER DAIR

THE SPECTRE OF THUNDERBOLT CAVERN



"THIS IS YOUR LAST RIDE,"
SAID A SOLEMN VOICE.

AMERICAN INDIAN



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BY COLONEL SPENCER DAIR

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The Spectre of Thunderbolt Cavern, or Tricked by Midnight Assassins

By Colonel Spencer Dair.

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS OF THIS STORY.

KAYAMON VATTEMARE—The aged leader of a robber-chieftain household. It comprised his beautiful daughter, and two Indians, and made trouble for all decent people around the territory that skirts Herschel Island, British North America. Vattemare, although old, has had a wonderful criminal career. His reputation dots the annals of crime in the North-West. One act of his alone contributed to the death of two brave sailors and marked him as a Midnight Assassin. The story of his downfall is one of the inner bits of criminal history of an historic country.

ADELE VATTEMARE—The daughter of the outlaw leader, who married an Indian named Olancho of The Spear. Her brains aided the little criminal family she was a member of in the work of looting the honest people about her. She fell a victim to the law, and her own cupidity. Her great beauty only made her downfall the more pointed, for she might have been a different woman under different surroundings.

OLANCHO OF THE SPEAR—An Indian, and husband of Adele Vattemare, the outlaw's fair daughter. Crafty and treacherous his death ended a wild career in a wild fashion after he had attempted to murder his wife.

WILD DOG—A Chipewyan member of the outlaw family headed by Kayamon Vattemare. His fight with a white man, and his death in a burst for freedom shows some phases of the North-West.

CLENNAM SLADE, alias RATTLESNAKE HANK—A young eastern man who has adventured his money in the whaler *Arctic Star* and has made money in killing whales, fur-trading,

and in general hustling for marketable articles in the Beaufort Sea and Arctic Ocean. He gets tangled up in a search for the inner secrets of a mysterious cavern known as "Thunderbolt Cavern" and in his attempts to solve a mystery comes across the trail of the Vattemare family of outlaws. How the young man wreaked vengeance on the outlaws is one long tale of diplomacy and fighting.

DIXON SQUIRE, alias SHORT CARD TOMMY—Dix as he is better known to his friends was a partner in the *Arctic Star* with Clennam Slade. He ably assisted his life long friend and fellow adventurer in the game of killing the bandits and played a brave part in the work of ending the depredations of old Vattemare and his Indian thugs.

CAPT. NAT POOLE—Commander of the *Arctic Star* and a whaler of ability. His seamanship brought a fortune to his employers Slade and Squire. He knew how to look after his ship and take a side squint at some brisk fighting of outlaws to git his "bit" of the outlaw loot.

JOHN POMERT—Harpooner of the *Arctic Star*. His untimely death was due to the depredation of the band of Midnight Assassins.

TOM GRANNIS—His untimely death gives a word picture of the terrible dangers that beset the whaler when an attempt is made to kill a whale.

SAMMY DRAKE—Driver of a Stage Coach which figures in a sensational hold-up.

BILL ACTON—Old Bill is a sailor and a character often seen among the "old slats" that live by whaling.

CHAPTER I.

A PHANTOM WAGER.

The sun seemed to be many times its ordinary size, and a black spot in its center resembled a hand grasping a dagger.

Dozens of other danger announcing daggers from the

edge of the sun's crimson colored disc pointed to the central hand and its dagger.

"What is that?" cried Clennam Slade, as he pulled in his fine black horse and with his gauntleted hand pointed across the tumbling waters of Beaufort Sea where in the purple of a late day in the Arctic regions,

that edge on Herschel Island, in Yukon territory, British North America, the sun had taken on this strange appearance.

Directly behind Clennam rode Dixon Squire, his great friend, and whose experience with the wilds of the North-West had been gained on many a day and night of stress.

Dix Squire raised his eyes in surprise of a mild type.

"It's the Sign of the Spectre," he said calmly and without emotion.

Clennam Slade gazed at his friend with wide eyes of curiosity.

"The Sign of the Spectre?" he asked. "What Spectre?"

"The Spectre of Thunderbolt Cavern," replied Dix. "Clen you are the most curious cuss I ever met in my life!"

Clen Slade kicked his foot out of his stirrups and jumped off his horse.

He flung the bridle back and the intelligent steed stretched his head and pawed the ground and appeared to be watching the uncanny phenomena cast by the sun with quite as eager eyes as his master.

Clen Slade continued to watch the unusual scene with inquiring eyes.

The sun slowly but surely disappeared as he watched. The aurora sprang into life and glided through the sky, leaving behind it what looked like a ghastly array of skeletons, standing out on the bluish clouds like phantoms.

The grim figures appeared to be pointing threatening fingers at the silent young watchers.

Then the scene faded and the landscape returned to the usual appearance of a cold, dreary, monotonous waste with no single feature that the eye could find pleasure in looking upon.

Spellbound Clen Slade stood watching the scene until night fell in absolute darkness with the change from daylight to night in a second with no visible twilight.

"Well!" Clen then ejaculated as he turned toward Dix Squire, for both young men were better known by their abbreviated names than by their longer baptismal ones.

"Well!" replied Dix.

"That's the most wonderful scene I've ever beheld," remarked Clen.

"Yes, it's wonderful enough—but I don't like to see it."

"Why not?"

"There's something about it that makes me shudder."

"Why?"

"I am not stuck on getting nearer to Spectres than I can make a good horse run—to get away from them."

Clen winked and laughed.

"You're sidling off your subject but in spite of your being a little mixed I know what you mean."

It was Dix's turn to laugh at his mixed remark.

"I suppose I'm funny, but to talk man to man, I don't like a close friendship with ghosts."

A grin, followed by a loud laugh, was the only reply of Clen Slade.

"A ghost!" he repeated. "Oh, you make me laugh! There's no such thing as a ghost!"

"How do you know there isn't?"

"How do I know? Say, you make me laugh again. Why everybody knows that there's no such thing as ghosts."

"What everybody knows usually isn't true."

"Your remark would seem to indicate that you are a believer in ghosts?"

"I am."

This time Clen laughed so loudly that his horse turned and looked at him in an inquiring manner. The other horse, on which Dix was still seated, appeared to nod in an affirmative manner at his master's words.

"Laugh if you want to," cried Dix in a deeply injured voice. "But some day or night I'll show you that you are mistaken—I will make you see a ghost or two, my laddie gay."

"I'll assume to still believe that you are not crazy, but I'll bet you ten peltries of white foxes, which are worth at least \$75 each, that you are not able to let me have a brimstone smell of a ghost."

"Where's the peltries!" asked Dix in a matter-of-fact voice. "You've got to show me you've got the peltries to sell—I'm from Missouri!"

"I like that! You know the peltries are back in the ship, the *Arctic Star*. I bought them on this cruise for darned few dollars of the Eskimos that have their inglos off near the upper end of Herschel Island on the main-land."

"Then you got them cheap. But there's not much to get now in the way of game around here but rabbit and ptarmigan, and the latter are rapidly going away."

"Well, it's summer and they go further North to feed—the ptarmigan—the rabbits are here all the time—I guess you've got the peltries, and it's a bet. Wait till I get out my betting book."

The two young men pulled little memorandum books and the bet was "on."

Clen, as soon as he had registered the bet wagers between the two men, read the entry aloud, which was to the effect that "unless Dix Squire showed Clen Slade one or more ghosts in two weeks from date, the ten peltries now on board the good whaling ship *Arctic Star*, chartered and operated by the firm of Slade and Squire, gentlemen adventurers, were to remain the sole property of the said Clen Slade, and the said Dix Squire was to pay over to the said Clen Slade, the current market price at Fort Churchill, British North America of the said peltries.

"On the other hand, if the said Dix Squire did show the aforesaid Clen Slade one or more ghosts in the stipulated time, the said Dix Squire was to become owner of the peltries, then and there, after the sight of the ghost or ghosts had been given the said Clen Slade."

The two young men, about a year prior to the foregoing conversation had chartered a whaling vessel, and had engaged a crew of experienced whalers; a captain, Nat Poole, who had been captain of a whaler, as Clen put it "since whales began" and the outfit had started for the Beaufort Sea, Hudson Bay, the Arctic Ocean, Coronation Gulf, or any place in the frozen North, where there could be big game, fur pelts, musk-ox horns, seal oil, whale oil, or anything that could be carted via the ship back to the civilized world and turned there into coin of the country of Canada or the United States, each young man being indifferent as to which country "stood" for the coin as long as they had the "coin."

The cruise was now nearly a year old and the general results had been good.

Financially the trip looked as if it would be a success and on the eve of returning to civilization, for it was summer now in the region and there was a chance to pull out any time without fear of icebergs, and floes, and the terrible dangers of a vast eternity of frozen waters heaped up like mountains, and stretching away in ever direction, that comes along with the early winter.

The *Arctic Star* had wintered at Herschel Island and had made a rather merry winter of it; for at the island is a settlement with a post of the Royal North-West Mounted Police, a Catholic and Church of England Mission, some trading stores, and an outpost of the great fur trading company, The Hudson's Bay Company, which had a fine postmaster in charge, so the long Arctic winter had passed pleasantly.

"I don't care if I lose," remarked Clen. "This trip has been pretty fine for us."

"Hasn't it?" returned Dix. "We have got some twenty whales."

"Isn't that a great killing? The twenty will figure up something like \$130,000."

"Then we got easily \$10,000 worth of furs, and I should say \$75,000 worth of seal oil, musk-ox ivory,—oh, it's been a good trip! Take it all in all and our receipts will be at least two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, and it will take one hundred thousand for expenses—taken all in all we will split one hundred and fifty thousand between us—not bad, boy! Aren't you glad I got you into this speculation?"

"You bet I am! I took all that was left of my fortune, after my father's sudden death in New York," added Clen, "and put it into this adventure, because you had made this trip before, and knew the country and—well you'd charm any man into putting his money in *anything*."

"Haven't I made good?" cried Dix. "I didn't have a cent when my father was alive and less after he was dead. He didn't live long enough after I was born to leave me much of anything but an appetite for food. I had to hustle and when I shipped as a cabin-boy on an Arctic whaler, it was because I thought the snow-balls and ice up here would at least be fresh—where I was in New York, I knew I'd get nothing but snow-balls and ice to eat that winter, and I preferred the fresh-grown kind in the Arctic to those soiled by the very dirty streets of the city."

"Lucky for me you shipped up here!"

"So it's turned out. There's something about this Arctic game that gets to you. The lure of the frigid North; the solitudes, the wide stretches of land and sea, the freeness—the air—say, I don't want to go back to civilization to *stay*. I want to be an Arctic trader and whaler all my life. I'm coming back here when we have cleaned up in the States."

"And you have shown me that ghost," grinned Clen.

"You hop on your horse. I'll show you! I hate horses out here. A dog-team and sled is better for our work, but you would take the trail over here to White Horse Rapids, on the Mackenzie River—say, what did you want to come here for any way?"

"Oh, just for fun. I don't like dogs or sleds, you know, and this horse rides like a rocking-horse—oh, say, how far are we from the municipality of White Horse Rapids?"

"'Bout five or six miles."

"How far back to Herschel Island?"

"'Bout fifty-six miles if you could fly. Fifty-six millions if you have to go on hoss back over this trail."

Clen Slade shrugged his shoulders. He did not feel like disputing the remark, for in the three days it had taken them to reach the point they were in, he had never seen a worse road.

"This is the Country God Forgot?" said Clen. "I'll admit that! Why, if the thing we have come over is a *trail*, what do they call unbroken country up here?"

"I don't dare to tell you. I want to live!"

"W-el-l, I suppose that I was a fool to come here to see White Horse Rapids."

"You were."

"Thank you. But why?"

"There's little here—but the rapids. They are rapid enough in getting out of the place to satisfy the most exacting."

"I don't blame the rapids here judging from what you say. Is there nothing at White Horse Rapids, but the rapids?"

"Oh yes! There's Kayamon Vattermare."

"Who's he?"

"A thief, horse, fur, cattle, ivory, men, women—he'll steal anything that he can lay his hand on, from a red-hot stove to a chipmunk!"

"Nice reputation you are giving him."

"No, I am not giving him his reputation. He got the reputation. I'm only telling you what he's got in the way of reputation—don't blame *me*. Oh I say, I didn't have anything to do with the making of his reputation."

"Well, no matter who built up the reputation, as you put it, he is a bad actor, isn't he?"

"The worst ever! He and his daughter make up quite a team—"

"His what?"

"His daughter."

"He has a daughter then?"

"I should say, yes. Good looking gal at that."

"You don't mean to say so! Lives here with the old man?"

"Yes. Seems to enjoy it too."

"Here in this forsaken hole?"

"Not here, a few miles from here."

"Anybody else live here?"

"Yes."

"Whom?"

"Eskimos—a few other white people about as bad as Kayamon, for he is known all over the territory by his first name."

"No one else?"

"Not so you'd be interfered with by the crowd."

"Has Kayamon a gang of thugs about him?"

"N—o. He doesn't seem to be heading any gang so far as I've heard. He is a sort of solitary outlaw, who lives on thieving, but there's enough of a gun-man about him to suit, you bet! He's mighty careful in his shootin' to shoot before 'tother fellow'!"

"In other words a bad man."

"You bet."

"Any one else in this interesting family?"

"One more thief."

"Who is he?"

"Injun."

"What kind?"

"Same old kind at that—the no good kind."

"What race?"

"Dunno—half breed I guess."

"What's his name?"

"Olancho, the Spear."

"Thunder! Sounds like a novel Indian."

"He is all right."

"Is what?"

"A novel Injun—he's the greatest novelty you ever met in the Indian line. He'd steal your gold tooth while you smiled; if you had one to steal."

"Must be a nice slick gent—is he?"

"The slickest you ever saw. Has a nasty habit of sticking a confounded spear into your vitals that he carries."

"That is why he is called The Spear?"

"Uh-uh!"

For some time Clen studied over the information that Kayamon's describer, Dix Squire, had word-photo-graphed.

"These chaps seem to be assassins," Clen said after a time.

"Worse than that—they not only seem to be assassins but they are."

Clen did not answer. Instead he stopped his horse and gazed away into the starlight night.

"Look here," he said. "I'm going to take a fall out of that Kayamon person. I don't like outlaws, or assassins, or bandits, or any law-breaker. Just for the fun of the thing I'm going to do some business with Kayamon and his gentlemanly side-partner Olancho, the Spear."

Dix did not answer for some time.

"Why," he said then. "What are you butting in for and disturbing the happiness of two outlaws, and the charming daughter of one of them? What is it to you?"

"Cash."

"Cash? Don't get you."

"Don't those fellows make something out of their game?"

"Y-e-s. But what of it?"

"Oh, nothing! Their pile added to my pile would make a little bit more of my pile, eh?"

"Y-e-s."

"Now they have looted a good many decent men, so this decent man is going to loot them——"

"Or get looted!"

"Right you are—or get looted."

"Seems to me that you haven't any right to jump on those chaps. They may be outlaws of note, but as long as they do not disturb you, what right have you to go and disturb them?"

"The right of the Strongest Arm. They have money and I need more money than I've got. So I go out and take their money—if I can—what's the difference between that method out here and the method in more civilized communities?"

Dix Squire did not answer.

"I don't suppose very much," he remarked. "Only I hate to see a nice young man get 'his' out here. You stand about as much chance of getting to the cash box of Kayamon as I do to saddle a right whale and go out for a day's swim on its back."

"Oh, very well! Meanwhile, when are you going to pay me those peltry prices? I mean on our bet as to the ghost."

For answer Dix got off of his horse.

He hitched the animal to himself in the North-West fashion of trailing his bridle on the ground by pulling it over his head, and strange as it may seem, a North-West horse is trained to stand as if tied to a hitching-post under such circumstances.

"Come on," said Dix.

"Come on where?" asked Clen, as he jumped from his horse and imitated the motions of his friend.

"Oh, don't ask questions. Come on! I'm going to win that phantom wager. Look here!"

As he spoke Dix parted some shrubs that hid the entrance to a cavern at the left of the trail a few hundred feet from where their horses stood.

Clen looked into the interior of the cavern.

"Good God!" he whispered as he drew back in alarm. "What is that I see?"

"*The Spectre of Thunderbolt Cavern*," replied Dix with a sneer. "I've got a girl East just dying for a set of white-fox furs!"

"You win!" replied Clen in a suffocated tone. "I never saw such a horrible sight in my life!"

CHAPTER II.

A FIGHT WITH A WHALE.

"There she blows!"

The look-out man in the mast of the whaler, *Arctic Star* cruising off Herschel Island, yelled these words to Captain Nat Poole, commander of the vessel who had been a whaler since he was ten years old, and was now near fifty, and as hard a fat chunk of hardy seaman as the world ever saw.

Ten minutes later, Cap'n Nat, as the men called him, had his whale-boat on the seas, where he hoped to make a great killing.

The boat was propelled by half a dozen sturdy sailors. They bent to their oars and sent the boat skimming over the water toward where the jets of spray showed a whale was "spouting"; that is throwing up water after submersion sometimes fifty feet in the air.

"Ain't this hard luck," cried Cap'n Nat. "This'll probably be the last whale we will kill this season, and both Clen Slade an' Dix Squire are ashore. Well! Give way boys with a will!"

The whale boat leaped ahead, while Jack Pomert, Harpooner for the *Arctic Star*, crept to the bow of the boat and began getting his kit ready; there was the tremendous long line of rope wound around a windlass tipped with the sharp steel harpoon.

When this darted to the vitals of the great leviathan it meant thousands of dollars to the ship, and as the craft was a pay and commission ship—that is, sailors signed for the long voyage, for so much a month, board, and a share in the catch—there was no end of excitement in the boat; each man had a share in the catch or kill.

Through its "spout hole" the whale could be seen forcing out its breath, which made the misty cloud like a great whiff of tobacco-smoke that told the watchers on a whaler that the whale "blowed" near them.

Experienced Cap'n Nat laughed to himself.

"It's a big bull right whale," he cried. "Say, John Pomert, have ye got th' harpoon-gun ready?"

"You bet, Cap'n, an' me hand-harpoon, an' me

lance, en aft thar's a pricker, an' a blubber-spade, so ef we don't git this feller, 'taint cause we ain't reddy."

The old salt chewed his tobacco again with a wide smile. He was ready for the fray.

The game the crew were in now was the sport of Kings!

Of all created living things the whale is the mightiest; at one time it basks under the fierce rays of the sun at the equator; again it is among the desert fields of the farthest North; of all game pursued by man for sport or for profit, a whale is the most sublime.

On the surface of the wide ocean the whale seems as graceful as a gold fish; to think that the greatest of other beasts by its side makes little more of bulk in comparison than the tiniest mouse, and yet it appears in the ocean waste of waters about it like a dainty fish, darting hither and thither in graceful abandon.

"Ho! Ho!" yelled Cap'n Nat, "wasn't I right when I said it was a right whale? See, there goes the cow that is with this bull out to sea."

The great bulk of the cow could now be seen rushing further toward the far outside ocean, beyond the land-locked bay in which the whales were first sighted.

"Yep!" cried John Pomert, "see the bull's waiting for us. It's a killer, and is waitin' fer us!"

Cap'n Nat knew what this meant.

He had knowledge of the danger from a whale called by whalers a "killer" that loved nothing better than to attack a whale-boat, and by one smashing blow of its great "fluke" crush the boat or contents into a jelly. Or what was worse, possibly, rush at the boat and crunch it in its wonderfully powerful jaws, while the men in the boat fell to watery death.

"Can't understand what makes that whale act so," cried Cap'n Nat. "Look thar!"

The whale was certainly acting in a most extraordinary manner.

This bull was about one hundred and fifty feet long and of huge bulk. The immense creature every now and then would "breach," as sailors call it, by writhing its tail and half its bulk in the air and then would come down upon the water until it foamed and boiled like a seething flood.

It would then rush forward like a craft of vengeance for a mile to repeat its motions.

"That whale acts mighty queer," cried Cap'n Nat. "Lookee, John! Be careful. That whale's been struck. Some one put a harpoon inter him, and he's crazy with pain and rage."

"Nonsense!" cried John Pomert. "Who's out here whalin' now? We've got th' ocean ter ourselves. Every whaler in th' fleet went back two weeks ago. They all thought th' last whale hed quit. hee! hee! This feller is our meat."

"Better stand by and use the harpoon gun on him," cried Cap'n Nat. "He's a dandy fighter and may charge us any minnit."

John shook his head.

"You hearties jest lay y'selves up near t' thet thar whale. I'll put me hand harpoon inter him, y' bet, quickern a cat kin jump wen ye says seat!"

The sailors gave a cheer. They loved the pluck of old John, although they knew the terrible danger that stood in their way, in attacking a bull whale when he was protecting his cow from attack; a maddened tiger was easier to face than the whale thus inspired.

But they "gave way" on the oars and soon were within striking distance of the whale.

"If I didn't know it, I'd say that whale was wounded," cried Cap'n Nat. "Say, I'm sure some one else has a harpoon in him."

By whaler law the whale belonged to the ship first getting a harpoon into the mammalia.

Cap'n Nat feared that some one else had struck the whale first; and if so that he would lose his catch, but said nothing about his fears to the sailors who were working with all force now.

"Gee, but look at the blubber!" cried Cap'n Nat.

He meant the fat which lies between the skins and the muscles of whales and which in the right whale varies from four to twenty inches in thickness and which supplies the whale-oil of commerce.

So full of oil is the average blubber that a cask closely packed with clean, raw blubber will not contain the oil and scraps extracted when heat is used to try the blubber out.

Within twenty-five feet of the whale Cap'n Nat had seen how big it was and his practiced eye had shown him that this cetacea representative was a prize for any one to find.

The whale was using its tail in the up and down motion with which it propels itself through the water.

"What a whopper!" cried Cap'n Nat. "This chap's tail is surely twenty-five feet wide."

The whale was easily making a speed of fifteen miles an hour; but he was not rushing straight ahead but was going in a circle.

"Funny thing that," muttered Cap'n Nat. "Is the whale crazy?"

The animal seemed to sight Cap'n Nat's craft.

Up flew its great "fluke" or tail high in the air, and down it went into the depths of the sea perpendicularly.

"Here's an hour to wait," thought the Cap'n.

Ordinarily the whale stays under water about ten to fifteen minutes at a time except when pursued and then it stays under for an hour Cap'n Nat knew.

An hour passed.

Then the whale came to the surface blowing the feathery vapor high in the air and thus announcing its presence once more.

"There she blows!" shrieked John Pomert, as the whale broke into view.

The whale-boat darted toward the creature and the harpoon went whirling to the body of the monster and penetrated to his vitals.

Cap'n Nat at the same time sent another harpoon flying to its mark from the harpoon gun and now had two lines out.

Terrified, the whale jumped from wave to wave, covering the surrounding ocean with a bloody foam, and churning it into a white canopy.

The whale made a deep dive, leaving a whirlpool in his path.

"He's off for deep water. Look out!" sang out Cap'n Nat.

The rope in the boat seemed to sing on each windlass.

Sailors poured water on it for fear that it would catch fire so fast did it spin.

"Look out for the rope," cried Cap'n Nat. "Ten years ago I saw a sailor have his foot cut off as clean as if done with a knife by stepping in the way of a coil of rope."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when the rope wound itself about the waist of John Pomert.

"Look out, John!" yelled Cap'n Nat. "Something has made the rope aft, kink!"

He had hardly time to speak when the body of poor John went headlong over the side of the boat, and disappeared into the sea with the rapidly paying out line.

The catastrophe was so sudden that all in the boat gazed blindly at the spot where the Harpooner had just stood not a second before, now vacant of his form.

Cap'n Nat gave vent to a volley of curses.

This was his way of expressing his deep sorrow at the probable loss of a man.

The sailors looked at each other in dismay but no one left the oars for no one knew how quickly his strength was to be needed in repelling a rush of the whale if he came to the surface and "rushed" the boat.

The only course then to pursue would be to row as quickly as possible away from the danger with scant chance of escaping it.

Cap'n Nat bewailed his lack of luck in not taking the motor-driven launch attached to the *Arctic Star* instead of the whale-boat.

But it was too late for repining.

"She's a'comin' up," yelled one of the sailors at this juncture, all whales being "she" to him.

"Charge her and git another harpoon inter her 'fore she rushes us," yelled Cap'n Nat, "a bull whale ain't goin' ter give up easy."

As he spoke the line slackened in the boat.

Two of the sailors began rushing it on the windlass, for fear it would again kink; another kink in the line meant an overturned boat and probable destruction of all in the whale-boat.

The boat was rushed to the point where it was thought the whale would "blow" again.

The bull in a few moments was on the surface of the water again, and the second it showed itself above water Cap'n Nat sent another harpoon into the animal from his harpoon gun, which exploded like a pack of tiny fire-crackers.

The whale seemed to make the entire ocean boil when he was struck this time.

Albatross, gulls, the haglets and the petrels came swarming down to see the battle, while the fins of sharks became black on the water all hurrying to the expected feast.

But the whale was game yet.

He had a lot of fight in him.

He was a "killer" and meant to kill before he suffered death.

With head down he rushed at the whale-boat.

"Give way, men, for your lives!" cried Cap'n Nat. "It's your only chance for life to row away from this fellow!"

The sailors bent to their oars and tore the boat through the water.

The whale with its tremendous head sticking out of the water like a light-house came flying through the seas.

"I've lost one man, you big brute," shrieked Cap'n Nat as he shook his fist at the whale, "d'ye want any more of my crew?"

As he spoke the animal charged nearer and nearer. "He'll hit us sure! We are all dead men!" shrieked Cap'n Nat. "Row boys, for your lives!"

CHAPTER III.

THE GHOSTLY CONCLAVE.

While Captain Nat Poole and his gallant crew were battling for life, the two owners of the staunch craft, the *Arctic Star* were gazing spellbound at a strange sight.

"It's a ghostly conclave, it seems to me," Clen Slade whispered to his companion, Dix Squire.

The scene they looked upon was a wonderful one.

When the bushes had been parted by Dix in his anxiety to win his wager from his companion, he had pulled away a shield to a great cavern.

The cavern was now directly beneath the young men and they were looking down upon it, through a large hole in its roof.

The cavern was a splendid one probably several hundred feet in width and almost the same in breadth.

It seemed to have high walls at the sides, which were paneled off into dark recesses.

In the center of this cavern stood a sort of throne.

Upon the throne sat a figure dressed in white.

There were crimson stains on its white robe, and its face was white and distorted by pain, while upon its head was a long wide cut, that seemed to be dripping blood.

Around this horrible figure, sat a great company of people all clad in black.

The faces of the multitude were so dazzlingly bright that neither Dix or Clen could tell one person in the assemblage had they known them. There was an air of deep attention on the faces, however, of all the black company and every one seemed to be facing the figure in white on the throne in the center of the cavern.

The figure was trembling convulsively; the crimson stream of blood was still falling from its wounds.

Then a voice rang through the air.

"Woe! Woe! Woe!" it cried.

With the three words said slowly and with immeasurable sorrow in each word, the cavern became black as night; there was nothing more to see.

Neither Clen or Dix stirred for fully ten minutes.

They stood gazing down into the dark cavern without a word, white, distraught, astonished and fearful.

Clen was the first one to rub his eyes and look utterly astonished at his companion.

"Did you see that?" he questioned with affrighted eyes.

"You bet I did!"

"There was a cavern there, wasn't there?"

"It seemed to me so."

"You saw that white figure on the throne?"

"Yes."

"You saw the figures in black grouped about the throne?"

"Yes."

"You saw the bloody stains on the figure on the throne?"

"Yes."

"What do you think of it?"

Dix shook his head.

"I don't know what to think of it."

"Neither do I!"

The young men gazed at each other in the star lighted night and for a long space silence fell between them.

At length Clen took some matches out of his pocket looked at them in a meditative manner, made a torch of some grass and shrubs, lighted the torch and threw it down the hole in the roof of the cavern, into the interior of the place where he had beheld the strange scene.

The torch made a light that looked like a falling star down into the cave, fell to the floor of it, and then went out.

But its fiery fall had lighted up the entire interior of the place.

Each watcher had seen that there was nothing there now save the empty space of a huge cave with here and there a vagrant small animal like a water rat.

"There's nothing there," whispered Clen, a superfluous remark.

"Absolutely nothing!" replied Dix, which was another superfluous remark.

The two men gazed at each other again.

"You win your bet, all right," cried Clen. "They were ghosts, eh?"

There was such an imploring note in the voice of the speaker that Dix would like to have told him that all that he had seen was enacted by live people.

"Now I am going to tell you all I know about this matter, and what there is said to be in it," remarked Dix. "You can draw your own conclusions. It's quite a long story."

"All right! Go ahead."

"There's a story here among the Eskimos that this cavern is the home of a spectre that watches over their fortunes."

"Yes."

"This spectre, the Eskimos think, lives in this cavern, which is called Thunderbolt Cavern—now listen and you will see why!"

Dix pulled aside the concealing earth from the hole in the roof of the cavern and bade Clen stoop down and listen to the noise within the cavern.

So Clen put his head down into the hole and listened intently.

"There is the roar, and crash as if of thunder," Clen remarked.

"Yes! That is why the Eskimos called the cavern 'Thunderbolt Cavern.'"

"Oh!"

"They call this spectre they claim they see now and then, the *Spectre of Thunderbolt Cavern*."

"Oh!"

"The Eskimos claim that never do they see the spectre, and the ghostly company appear in the cavern, as we have done, without some one in their tribe dying a violent death."

"Then that means that the spectre seems to portend a death by violence in the tribe of the Eskimos?"

"That's it! Not only does the death by violence come to a member of the tribe of the man who sees the token, but it strikes upon the immediate family of the man who sees the spectre."

"Ha!"

"There's more horrors to come. Not only does the appearance of the spectre mean trouble for the person seeing it, but the fact that he may see the wraith if he looks into the cavern, is shown to him by signs of a dagger in a man's hand which appears in the central

disc of the sun surrounded by other daggers around the sun."

"Just as we saw them."

"Just that way."

Clen studied over the revelation.

"Now as we both saw the sun-sign and we each saw the spectre in the cavern, we each are 'in it' so far as the death by violence is concerned," Clen remarked.

"I suppose so."

"The trembling, bloody corpse on the throne meant that we were to be the victims by trembling and bleeding as we were gazing."

"I suppose so."

Clen relapsed into thought again.

"What do you think of the story?" he asked.

"I don't know what to think of it. I know that I have heard the story a dozen times from various Eskimos who have their ingloos here, and who fish and hunt hereabouts. They believe the story and tell all kinds of stories to prove it. This Eskimo saw the dagger-hand in the sky, looked into the cave, saw the spectre, and two days later was gored to death by a musk-ox; that Eskimo saw the sign and the wraith and fell into a crevasse in the ice and was killed; this one was drowned—every one *after* seeing the sign and looking into the cavern, and seeing the spectre."

Clen went into a close communion with his thoughts again.

"What do *you* think of it?" asked Dix in return.

"Rot!"

"But you'll admit the danger?"

"Not a bit of it—if a man's going to die he'll die, dagger-sign or spectre sign notwithstanding."

"But what do you think about it?"

"I think if it's a man's time to cash in, cash in he will dagger-hand spectre or nothing—but I don't know otherwise. I don't know anything more except that I'm going to find out ghost or no ghost, dagger-hand—or no dagger-hand, what all this *means*. Don't you try to make me believe that there's anything ghostly in this unless there *is*. Dix, you told me you were from Missouri and had to be shown about my peltries, now about your infernal ghosts, and sky-signs let me tell you that *I'm from Missouri also—you've got to show me*."

Dix had been watching Clen with a quizzical smirk on his mobile face. He wanted to see how far the in-born fear of the uncanny, superstitious man would allow to affect his understanding; he wanted to see whether Clen was a superstitious fellow afraid of ghosts, or a hard-headed fighting man that "had to be shown" a ghost or anything else he did not understand before giving way to fear.

Dix saw that Clen "had to be shown" and he laughed.

"Go ahead with your red wagon," Dix cried. "I'll climb aboard."

"Of course you will! Let's appoint ourselves a Committee of Two on Investigations. If it's a ghost and is on the level in this warning and we have got to die out here, we will die like gentlemen anyway without a murmur and with Christian resignation."

"Bully for you!"

"If it isn't a ghost but some kind of a fake that some one is putting up on these poor ignorant Eskimos, we will have fun with the gent, and show him what a real ghost like us is, eh?"

"That's sound argument. Fight or not I'm with you. 'Give me liberty or give me death!'"

Dix struck a Patrick Henry in March—1775—attitude, and shook his revolver holster, until the butt of a weapon that looked all business twinkled in the starlight.

Slade screwed up his face greatly pleased at Dix.

"Now then," Dix continued. "Having settled the destinies of the Nations of the World, made the clock start on its weary round once more, may I ask, without bringing the blush of shame to the cheek of modesty, what your Imperial Highness proposeth to do next?"

"If by that title you mean me, I'll tell you in a jiffy. I'm going to take a fall out of your friend Kayamon, the thief, the bandit, and the general allround outlaw, you either did or did not slander by your remarks as to his reputation some time ago."

"Oh!"

"How extremely sweet of you—will it be Greeco-Roman style or—here you both—put your hands over your heads individually or collectively or I'll fill you full of shot!"

The two men looked up where not ten feet away with a double-barreled shot-gun held to her shoulder stood a woman, whose drawn angry brows belied the silvery tone in her voice.

Clen Slade thought the girl with the unwavering shot-gun the prettiest creature he had ever seen.

But he knew after one glance that she would kill him if he did not obey her, so he shoved his hands and connecting arms over his head with a grunt while Dixon Squire did the same.

"Now you two young men, having obeyed me, just listen to my lecture," cried the sweet girlish voice.

CHAPTER IV.

"THE MIDNIGHT ASSASSINS."

The whale-boat impelled by the powerful arms of the sailors churned the waters of the ocean while the oars almost snapped as the sailors sent the craft along in hopes of escaping the on-rush of the leviathan of the deep.

The situation was thrilling to every one on board.

All were old whalers and all knew the danger.

While every effort was made to escape, every man kept his head and the whale-boat showed no sign of anything untoward happening to the most critical eye.

These tars were Jackies of long standing.

They worked hard to escape but they made no panic-like demonstration.

Every man knew that his life depended on his "keeping his feet on the ground" and working with a will.

Cap'n Nat was cool to all outward appearances.

He knew that further use of the harpoon was useless.

But he cleared away his bomb-lance, a contrivance that often is used in such perilous situations and one that sometimes saved the crew. The lance a shaft of pointed steel, fired by a bomb directly into the beast, some times struck a vital part.

"Row, ye lubbers!" screamed Cap'n Nat. "Here comes th' critter. I'll have one shot at her right now."

The "her" was now not more than fifty feet away.

The big bull had settled down somewhat in the water and was coming at the boat as if impelled with a sole desire for vengeance.

The animal was swimming with a wild spasmodic start directly at the whale-boat as if intending to drive it to atoms with its monstrous head.

The party could hear the whale's huge jaws striking together with terrific sound.

"Now!" howled Cap'n Nat, as he let drive the lance-bomb.

The whale's enormous flukes were seen to be whirling up from the boiling sea.

They flashed above the entire after part of the whale-boat.

Would they descend and shiver the boat to atoms?

With lightning like rapidity the flukes descended just as the boat swept around to give Cap'n Nat a chance to aim his lance-bomb.

"Look out!" shrieked Cap'n Nat. "Look out fer them flukes! *Give way, boys, or we will be smashed into inch bits!*"

As one man the sailors hurled the boat forward.

The tremendous flukes descended upon the water, but apparently escaped the boat by only a few feet.

The sound as the flukes or huge tail struck the water was deafening.

But the boat danced upon the heaving foam swept waves apparently unharmed.

"Row! Row! Row!" howled Cap'n Nat. "The critter may breach again."

Then came a horrible swirl of water.

There was an immense whirlpool to be seen and the whale disappeared as if into the center of its vortex.

"How's that!" yelled Cap'n Nat. "The critter's dove!"

In spite of his grammar Cap'n Nat told the truth. The animal had sunk to the ocean depths. This was evidenced by the whirring of the windlass as the two lines began to pay out as the monster sank deeper and deeper.

"Be sure the line has cleared away, Tom Grannis," cried Cap'n Nat, to the sailor seated aft whose duty it was to watch the lines when a whale was rushing off with it, to aid all he could in the keeping of the line clear of kinks.

No answer came.

"Tom!" yelled the Cap'n. "Oh, Tom! Where's Tom Grannis?"

The sailors resting on their oars looked over their shoulders to the after part of the boat where Tom Grannis ought to have been seated near the two windlasses.

There was no one there!

A gasping cry ran through the boat.

Before further examination could be made the windlasses stopped revolving.

"We've lost the critter!" cried Cap'n Nat. "See, the rope's stopping!"

Cap'n Nat rushed aft.

Just at the boat's stern was a wide gaping opening just above the water-line so that the craft did not sink.

This opening was as round and cleanly cut as if made by a saw.

The bloody edges told too plainly of the fate of Tom Grannis.

He had been stricken down and torn through the side of the boat the moment the flukes descended and such was the incalculable force of the blow that the main timbers of the large whale-boat were unsprung.

"We have lost two men, and we have lost the whale,"

sighed Cap'n Nat. "I'm putty sick o' this here v'yage. Boys, row back t' the ship!"

The men went aboard the ship without further incident talking in low tones of the double-disaster.

When the whale-boat had been hoisted to its davits the crew gathered around it.

They talked in low tones of the disaster.

One of the men, Bill Acton, looked at the bloody-edge of the clean cut place and fingered the harpoon that was at the end of the line coiled about one of the windlasses. The other line had parted and the whale had run off with the harpoon and the line.

Bill fingered the harpoon.

Then he turned to one of the men near him.

"Whar did that harpoon get from?" Bill Acton asked.

"'Twas th' one thet poor John Pomert, our Harpooner, stuck inter th' whale wen we fust gits t' th' critter," replied one of the crew of the whale-boat.

"Ho! Thet's funny! But 'taint one' o' our harpoons. Thet harpoon didn't git offen the *Arctic Star*. Thet aint no harpoon like th' ones we carry—I never seen it before."

Cap'n Nat heard the words and ran over to the side of the whale-boat.

"See! Thet aint our harpoon," added Bill Acton, in his customary drawling manner. "We ain't got none aboard like et."

"Nonsense," replied Cap'n Nat. "How'd any odder harpoon git aboard us—by gosh, yar right! This ain't our harpoon!"

Cap'n Nat's face was wrinkled with his anxiety.

"By George!" he added. "What can this mean?"

He looked over the harpoon.

It was the hand-harpoon that ill-fated John Pomert had whirled at the whale just before he was dragged overboard.

But the heavy shank was made of iron, home-moulded, Cap'n Nat saw.

The upper shaft was part of an older harpoon and the flanged arrow-head was crude and made without doubt by hand; not in the steel mill forged style of the more modern weapon of offence against the whale possessed in abundance on the *Arctic Star*.

"It's not one o' our harpoons," muttered Cap'n Nat after a minute examination. "Bill Acton is right! But it's attached to our rope—no, by George, thet ain't none o' our rope!"

Bill Acton critically and slowly looked over the rope.

"Naw," he remarked. "Et aint none o' our rope. Thet rope's ten year old ef it's a day; ourn's all new rope."

The eyes of the Cap'n and the old sailor met.

"Some one hez changed th' rope an' th' harpoon onto us," cried Cap'n Nat.

"Aint no question o' thet," said Bill Acton in reply, while a round circle of interested sailors nodded and looked sober.

"Th' reason w'y th' rope kinked an' weound about John Pomert," added Cap'n Nat, "was because some one took our new rope an' our new harpoon an' left this old rope and this old harpoon in its place."

"Sure," remarked Bill.

"It was rank murder ter do that, lads," cried Cap'n Nat.

"It war," shouted one of the listening sailors. "But

didn't John Pomert, the chief Harpooner, hev charge o' them lines an' harpoons?"

"Yes," snapped the Cap'n.

"Then he brung th' trouble onto himself didn't he?" the sailor added. "He outer hev seen thet th' harpoon wasn't ourn nor th' rope."

"Yep," cried Bill Acton. "Thet's true!"

Cap'n Nat nodded. He knew this was so. But the thing that was bothering him was how could it be true.

"Thet's right," Cap'n Nat said. "Thet's right! But it don't seem ter me that I senses how th' rope and harpoon gets changed, and if they was changed, as we know they was, how it was thet John Pomert didn't notice it."

"Thet's right," drawled Bill Acton—"but ets shore thet it aint one o' ourn neyther th' rope ner th' harpoon. An' we've lost two men."

"Yep," snapped Cap'n Nat, who saw that it was best not to talk more with the crew. Sailors were queer sometimes, and got funny notions. This all might breed any kind of a panic.

So Cap'n Nat hurried to his cabin, calling his chief mate, Arthur Middlebrook, to follow him as he passed to it.

The Cap'n soon was talking to his assistant.

"You heard didn't ye about th' rope an' th' harpoon?"

"Yes," replied Middlebrook.

"What d' ye think o' et?"

"Looks to me as if some one had sneaked aboard the ship some time or other and made the change."

"Thet's jest what I've been thinkin'."

"But the thing that staggers me, was how could any one get aboard?"

"Simplest thing you know of. When we were in winter headquarters near Herschel's Island the Eskimos an' any one else had the run of the ship."

"Thet's so."

"What was to hinder some sneak coming aboard and watchin' his chances of sneaking away with the rope and the harpoon puttin' his old truck in its place—up here that ropes worth a good many thousand dollars and harpoons like ours are like blackberries, mighty scarce up here at the jumping off place before you get to the North Pole."

"Shore!"

"The only thing you get up here like civilization is thieves, it seems to me."

"Yep! Thar aint much difference 'tween th' city outlaw and the country outlaw, an' it's the same breed o' pups here, or thar; out in these wilds or back thar among them cities. The thief who tuck m' rope an harpoon hez taken th' lives o' two o' my best men. Fer ef et had been our harpoon thar'd been a good deal of whale by th' side o' thet ship hyer. Ef thet whale wouldn't hev brought in this hyar outfit about ten thousand dollars in whale oil, and whalebone, an' th' rest o' him we cud sell—so thar's a money loss every whar."

Cap'n Nat's brows grew darker and darker.

Big swear words trembled on his lips.

"Say, I'd commit murder en a minnit," he cried.

"Ef I could fin' out who done me this dirt."

"That ain't hard for those who knows this territ'y."

Cap'n Nat gave Middlebrook a sharp glance.

"Whacher mean?" the Cap'n asked.

"Ever hear of Kayamon Vattemare, the outlaw?"

"Naw."

"Well, he lives hyer! He's the chap what has got your harpoon and your rope and you've got his."

"What?" roared the Cap'n with many strange and wierd oaths.

"That's right," calmly repeated Middlebrook. "You see the whalin' season was looked to be over. All the rest of the whalers are 'homeward-bound.' This chap has about figured that you're going to leave with the whaling fleet, so he corralled your rope and harpoon, put his in the place of it, and supposed that as you'd have no further use for the rope or harpoon in killing any more whales, that you'd be hull down from here any way before you discovered his theft and then you'd not come back on the off chance of regaining your stuff."

"He'd be in a good rope thet no whale ever got away from 'afore, an' one o' th' finest harpoons on the airth—stead we hez his rotten plunder. Now then, ef I had th' feller that did this hyar I'd kiek him right plumb full o' holes so he'd look like a 'Jersey' skeeter nef—say, I would!"

"W-e-l-l you aren't too late yet!"

"What d'ye mean?"

"I mean that the same fellow that took your rope and your harpoon has got hold of your two employers, Clen Slade and Dix Squire."

Cap'n Nat was intensely astonished.

He opened his mouth to speak but the words would not come. So he stuttered and gasped like a fish just out of water.

Then he choked and swore like a crazy man and when he had calmed down somewhat he looked at Middlebrook and helplessly asked him what he meant.

"You have been tearing about like a crazy bull whale for the past three seconds," cried Middlebrook. "If you will wait I will tell you what I mean."

"G'wan," cried the Cap'n.

"Your men, you know, your two partners are tied up as prisoners of Kayamon the outlaw."

Soon as the words were said Cap'n Nat swore again.

"How do you know?" he cried at length.

"For this reason," calmly replied Middlebrook as he extended his hand to the Cap'n.

The hand held a note.

When Cap'n Nat had read the note it made him angry. The note stated that his two partners needed assistance and needed it badly.

"Them two fellers, by heck, need my help," shouted Cap'n Nat as he read the note. "I'm goin' to turn out some of this crew an' go to help them an—"

Middlebrook grasped Cap'n Nat's arm in his powerful hands.

"Don't do that," he said. "Don't do that! If you do it will seal the death warrants of those men. Be careful, I beg of you! The *Midnight Assassins* that stole your harpoon and your rope have the two owners of this expedition in their clutches. If you don't act with great care Clen Slade and Dix Squire will be murdered!"

CHAPTER V.

A SHOT-GUN ARGUMENT.

There is no possible argument that one can set up in the face of a shot-gun.

The girl who had drawn a bead on Clen Slade and

Dix Squire, was tall, lithe and pretty as a spring morning. She wore a dark suit of blouse and knickerbockers, which showed her graceful limbs, and left them free from the impediment that skirts would have added to them in the North-West desolate country with wide spaces of almost desert land, and bits of forest here and there.

She wore a wide hat, and her great black eyes, and her black hair showed off the dead whiteness of her face, which was yet after all its pallor the face of a healthy girl of twenty years or so.

"Now, you men," she called, when she was sure that neither Clen or Squire was going to attempt to dispute her command, "hands up, come forward here, and tie these young men together."

The forms of two hulking savages came forward with stealthy tread from the woods at the girl's command.

One Indian was Olanchio, the Spear, a thug of the worst kind; the other was Wild Dog, a Chipewyan, and a noted cut-throat of the territory.

"Ugh!" cried Olanchio. "Heap tie up white man!"

"Tie deep!" said Wild Dog. "Cut hard!"

He kept his word.

When he had stopped binding up Clen and Dix the men felt as if they were bound in iron bands. The blood seemed to be starting from every pore under the pressure of the willow withes placed upon them, which the Indians with true Indian dexterity bound in the most cruel manner possible.

"Thunder!" Clen said. "This hurts I tell you!"

"Same here. Wonder what they are going to do with us," returned Dix. "We are in for some unpleasant time anyway."

The two men bore their troubles like heroes. But at the same time they had some curiosity as to their fate. They had not been gagged and, as their captors were talking apart with the girl, had plenty of time to talk to each other.

Clen continued the conversation.

"This must be Kayamon's girl. I mean the one that held us up," he said.

"That's right! She's a wild-cat, and has a very steady hand on a gun, don't you think?"

"Ree-markably steady! I thought the next breath she would blow my head off in true female bandit style."

"So do I. Say, but she's a good-looker!"

"Nothing in or out of petticoats looks good to me when she holds a gun to my head and says, 'Hold up your hands!'"

"Perhaps you're right!"

"What about this girl?"

"I don't know much to tell you except she is worse than her father."

"Is that so?"

"Yes. Not only that but she is said to be married to the Injun Olanchio."

"You don't tell me!"

"I don't know how true it is. If she is, she's a peach and dandy wife for even a savage to have. I'd be afraid she'd shoot me just to keep her hand in."

Both men laughed. They felt that laughter was better than swearing although each was ready to swear if the occasion demanded and each felt that it did.

"Well, she's a good looker to throw herself away on a bandit," said Clen after awhile.

"Good looks and good temper don't often go together. I am not hankering after a wife of that stamp nor am I hankering after any further look at this young woman."

"What's her name?"

"Adele."

"Adele Vattemare. Not a bad name."

"Name's better than the owner."

"What is she—French-Canadian?"

"N—o. Not exactly. Her father is a French-Canadian and her mother was a Chipewyan squaw. They were married out here by a priest over at Herschel Island about thirty years ago. They had two children. This girl and a son."

"What became of the son?"

"He was shot in a saloon fight over at White Horse Rapids when there used to be a town of that name there."

"They planted the son—how about the town?"

"That planted itself. Don't know why. It naturally quit easy like. It was a frontier town that lived on the trapper. By and by game got scare up here, and trappers did not trap hereabouts. So the town died and there's not much left there save the house of old Kayamon Vattemare—he's past seventy now—and this girl and her Injun hubby, Olancho."

"What became of Olancho?"

"What became of him—what do you mean? He was here a few minutes ago and you know what became of him when he began to bind us up!"

"I mean what became of Olancho when he married the girl? Her disposition would be to chase him out of the house with a broom."

"I don't know about that. They do say he's had his troubles. But anyway, the girl's about the worst tempered thing out of wild animal life in the North-West."

"There's some pretty nifty tempered things in the wilds, you know."

"Well, she's got an angry polar bear stopped a mile."

"Don't like our outlook."

"Neither do I. If she don't boil us in seal-oil we are lucky."

"I don't think she will."

"Why not?"

"We are more valuable alive than dead."

"How?"

"We have money."

"I haven't more than a dollar sixty in my clothes now."

"But, you know, my dear fellow, you have much money back at the ship, and the ship's worth some cash. I guess your 'wuth' considerable."

"Well, so are you then."

"I admit it—but this girl is too shrewd not to know that this fact is so. She's going to hold us for ransom."

"Gosh! A lot of ransom she'll get."

"She'll get it, if we don't escape, or she'll slit our throats with that keen looking knife she has hanging to her belt."

"Right oh!"

"So don't worry. You're going to have a lot of fun before you get rid of some of your chips."

Clen's face was white with pain of his bonds and the wrath that surged in his heart.

"Well, how about an escape?" he whispered.

"How about your grandmother?" Dixon inquired.

"Here we are trussed up, and hung up like two hogs

ready for market. There's a girl with a gun, two Indians with two dittoes, to say nothing about old man Kayamon Vattemare, who can handle a gun quick, back there in the once metropolis of White Horse Rapids—all watching us, all ready to shoot—and you talk about an escape!"

"I've got out of smaller holes than these," cried Clen.

"Any way we will see what we see."

The sweet Adele Vattemare chimed in as the young man ended his words.

"Which one of you two young idiots," she said, "was anxious to come here and stick us up for our cash box?" she inquired.

Clen tried to bow. He did not accomplish the feat very well because he was so bound up but made a fair stagger at the act of courtesy.

"Quite well done," said the girl. "Very well done! So well done that I suppose you don't want me to ask you how you could think of such an ungentlemanly thing as to come here and try and get at *our* cash box? Really, you know, we need our cash box! No question of it. And we are going to try and get some of the cash out of your cash box. Then ours will be fuller than it is."

The girl nodded to her husband, Olancho.

Olancho was tall, strong, copper-colored and wore a deer-skin heavily trimmed with beads. A collar made from the teeth and claws of polar bears was strung about his neck.

He wore moccasins, and heavy gaiters of moose-skin, tanned with the hair on the outside.

He carried a belt with two revolvers of good pattern and heavy calibre, and in his belt, also, was a tomahawk of stone, a rough weapon, but in a strong hand and propelled by a strong arm, one that could brain an enemy with ease.

The savage's face was seamed with a scar that began at the top of the forehead and ran down to his chin.

It was gained in a brush with the authorities who had tried several years ago to arrest him when he was sneaking about Herschel Island. They had not been successful in making the arrest and Olancho had gotten away with a stab-wound across his evil visage, but the fight had made the hamlet of Herschel Island too hot for the outlaw breed, and neither Kayamon Vattemare, his daughter, Adele, Olancho, or Wild Dog ever made anything but covert appearances at Herschel Island thereafter.

That they did some times visit the hamlet was evidenced by the disappearance of things.

The general thievery of the hamlet was laid at the doors of the Vattemare gang at all events, whether they were guilty or not.

This Adele well knew and now that she had the chance to make one grand coup and replenish the depleted cash-box of the gang was an opportunity that the acute girl did not propose overlooking.

While the loot of the Vattemare's was considerable she knew that it was in fur peltries, ships stores, and a lot of the valuable and general mercantile articles a good thief and band of thieves can pick up about the place where whalers winter; in fact there was in one loot taken from a wrecked whaler at least five thousand dollars' worth of whale-bone to say nothing of many barrels of whale-oil and seal-oil and ship's stores.

It was impossible to dispose of these articles around Herschel Island without some one discovering that

there had been thieves from the Vattermare gang at work, a fact shrewdly suspected and yet not clearly proven.

"In fact," said Adele, "I am going to try and get some of your cash to fill up my cash-box, for I heard you make a brag that you would get to the one of my father's!"

Clen nodded briskly.

"Oh yes," he said. "I heard you this time—also let me state to you that I did say that I was going to loot your father's cash-box, and I'm going to do it. Further let me tell you that I am going to clean up your thieves' gang here incidentally."

Adele's face was white with anger at first.

But the joke of a prisoner, bound and far from his friends, threatening her and the Vattermare gang of bandits, was too great for her sense of humor to stand. The girl laughed clearly.

"How do you think you are going to accomplish all this?" cried Adele.

For answer Clen did a startling thing that created terror in the hearts of his foe!

CHAPTER VI.

A FALL FOR LIFE.

Clen Slade made the biggest grand stand play of his life!

Right under the eyes of his foes he wriggled to the edge of the bluff on which he reclined and with a resounding crash hurled himself into the depths far below.

With absolute promptness Dix, although he had no tip in advance, followed his companion in the same manner.

By a wriggling of his confined limbs and a great writhe of his body he followed Clen over the cliff and down into the depths below.

As Dix crashed through the trees, the birds made a loud screaming of many notes, and then all was still.

To Dix's great astonishment he fell only about fifteen feet and then fell upon a sandy bank.

The fall nearly knocked the breath out of him but he managed to get it back in a short space of time.

Just as he was doing so he heard the sibilant voice of Clen hiss in his ears.

"Look out," Clen said, "come this way!"

"It's dead easy to come any way, you know, bound as I am," furiously whispered back Dix.

A smothered laugh caused him to turn to where he saw Clen performing the most astonishing evolutions.

Clen was standing by a rock, with sharp, rough edges.

He was rubbing his willow gyves on this rock and slowly but surely was freeing himself.

As he did so, however, he was making the strangest kind of motions. His face was distraught with the pain of trying to stand upright bound, while his evolutions in attempting to cut the willow ropes with the sharp edges of the rock, were as uncouth as a bear at a dancing party.

"Do as I do," shrilled Clen. "Hurry for your life! The men will be on top of us in five minutes from the place we jumped off. Hear those infernal bandits yell."

The cries of the outlaws could be plainly heard above the party on the cliff.

"How did you ever dare to make this fall," said Dix as he assiduously applied his bonds to the other side of the rock at which Clen was working and at the same time repeated the eccentric motions of his fellow.

"By using my brains," cried Clen as he snapped himself free at length and began rubbing his limbs to start circulation.

Soon Dix was free also.

"I don't see what brains had to do with that jump," said Dix. "You jumped off a rocky bluff into what looked like a canyon two thousand feet deep. If your coming out was not sheer bluff then I don't know what was."

"Bluff? You idiot! Bluff? Why, Dix, I looked down while that girl was saying things about us to the bluff and I saw a squirrel run down a tree and then I saw him not two minutes later running along the edge of the cliff and it seemed to me either he was the fastest flying squirrel I ever saw or he was the biggest jumper because it was easily one hundred feet from the tree in which I first saw him to the place he was running."

"What does that prove?"

"That he was able to run down the tree to the ground and over the ground to the edge of the cliff. I argued from that there could not be much of a fall from where I was to the bottom of the cliff. Then I took a chance."

"Wow! Took a chance? I should say you did! It was wonderful! How in the world you dared take the chance, Clen; if you'd found the bottom about ten hundred feet away instead of the ten or fifteen feet, what you would have said would have been a caution!"

"Nonsense! I would not have said a thing. I could not have talked if I had wanted to after a fall of ten hundred feet."

"Well, it was the chance that won. I'm surprised at it. Very much surprised at it. If it wasn't a nervy thing to do to launch yourself on the evidence furnished by that squirrel into space, I'm a crazy man! Suppose there had been two squirrels, and this fact didn't dawn on you before you jumped?"

"I'd have to have it dawn quick after I had jumped to know much about it. But I felt sure I had picked the right squirrel. As it turned out I did."

"W-e-l-l, I'll tell you something. I don't launch myself on to the air over canyons that look as if they went down a thousand feet or more on the say so of the biggest squirrel that ever lived."

Clen smiled.

"Then," he added, "there were the trees. It didn't seem to me that those trees were half as tall as they looked—see they are stunted maples—and they aren't only about six feet high. To look down on them as we did above there in the company of those outlaws looked as if we were looking down into an immense depth on top of trees far below us, but, really you see, we were only looking a few feet. The only danger of a jump seemed to me that we were bound and might go down head-first and break our fool necks. As it is, you see, we landed on our—ouch, I've wrenched my back, all right——"

"Ouch! I've wrenched me everywhere," cried Dix.

The two young men straightened up and laughed merrily.

"Funny game, isn't it," remarked Clen. "Well, we've won! Otherwise what's the odds? I would

rather have jumped off into the ten thousand-foot canyon you spoke of than have faced that girl further. I don't allow any one to rub it into me male or female."

As he spoke Clen dashed away hot footed down the banks of a wide creek that meandered along the sandy bank on which the intrepid men had fallen.

They could hear above them as they crouched low in the shade of the trees and brush, the oaths and shouts of their pursuers rushing forward at lightning speed down the side of the ravine, evidently thinking that the gully was a deep canyon, and trying hard to find a place down which to clamber.

"See," said Clen, "they are after us! They think the canyon falls down into great depths. I think we are saved if we run this way."

So speaking Clen ran stealthily through the woods until he was, as he supposed, far in the lead of his pursuers.

As Clen rounded a bit of rocky promontory, he saw directly ahead of him the form of a man.

The man was tall, black-browed, with a wealth of black hair that grew all over his face, and fell to his waist. The hair was tinged with gray, and while the eyebrows of the man were also black, there was much gray with the ebon locks.

The wrinkled face showed the man to be well along in years.

But his form, due to his long years of outdoor life, was erect and vigorous as a man still in his prime.

"Halt!" The man yelled in a stern, yet low voice. "Hist up yer han' er I'll blow y' so full of holes thet y' won't hold water."

A hugh revolver emphasized his words.

"Trapped!" hissed Clen as he fell back before the raised weapon.

Not so did Dix accept the order.

He made a grand leap forward jumped under the gun and pushing it upward flung the man backward on the ground as though he had been a child.

"Take that!" snarled the angry young man.

The man "took it" hard because he didn't move but lay senseless while Dix, his eyes still blazing with battle-light, ran onward followed by Clen.

"Did you know who that was," grinned Clen as he ran forward and joined his running mate.

"No. Nor I didn't care. I had no gun. He had a gun. I have a gun!"

"It was the outlaw chief, old Kayamon Vattemare," replied Clen.

"Well, I hope the fall has killed him! If I'd known it was he I would have shot him with his own weapon."

"Never mind. We have his gun and are free any way."

"Not so free as you think judging from the sounds coming behind us. The outlaw pack is in full cry. They can take their time in following us for in this soft bottom land we make tracks a tenderfoot could follow."

"That's right," said Clen, "I know a way to obviate that."

He made a hop, step and a jump to a tree ten or fifteen feet away.

The tree was a fallen monarch of the forest. He ran along the tree to its end which was at least fifty feet from where he jumped. Then Clen made another leap to a tree still further on and then climbed up one that

stretched its head high in the air up the side of the canyon the men had been running along.

Then when he had reached the top of the tree Clen made a leap to the top of the canyon, which now was level with him; as the canyon from the point where he had first jumped into it had deepened as he and his companion ran along, so that the trees in effort to reach the upward light appeared to be growing taller and taller.

This brought Clen, who was closely followed by Dix, to the table-like top of the plateaux similar to the portion they had stood upon when held up by Adele Vattemare, and about a mile from where she was now rushing down in the canyon in company with her husband, Olancho, and Wild Dog.

"Hear them shrill out their savage yells," said Clen, as he paused to take breath.

"They are yelling madly enough!" replied Dix.

There came a dead silence.

"What do you think made that?" asked Dix.

"What d' you suppose that means?" asked Dix again.

"They have found the ruffian you hit in the nose and robbed of his gun," replied Clen. "Goodness knows they'll yell about it before long."

The words were verified by a strenuous scream from the canyon.

"Yes, they found old Vattemare! I wonder if the villain is dead?" dryly remarked Dix. "He was hit hard enough to kill most any man. I saw his heels go higher than his head as he went over backward."

A snarl in which their names could be plainly heard came floating up from the canyon.

"They are next to us all right," remarked Clen. "It's time for us to duck."

"Quack!" replied Dix. "Here they come! I'm going to take a shot at Wild Dog any way."

Dix steadied the revolver in his hands and the sharp report, and puff of smoke sent to the climbing Indian below a message in the shape of a lead bullet with a steel nose.

"You got him!" cried Clen, as Wild Dog threw up his hands and spun about on his heel.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ASTONISHED OUTLAWS.

In the outlaw ranks nothing came so quickly as the escape of the two prisoners in the memory of Olancho of the Spear, his white wife, Adele, daughter of the outlaw, Kayamon Vattemare, and Wild Dog, the Chipewyan.

In the flash of an eye-lid Clen Slade and Dix Squire jumped into space and went crashing into the depths below.

No one of the outlaws believed but that the canyon here was hundreds of feet deep.

That the canyon rose to a sort of sandy hilly space right here, and was deeper two hundred yards either way from the outlaws was not known to them.

They fancied that the uniform depth was the same all the length of the canyon, which was only a deep fissure in the mountain over which they had passed earlier in the day.

Every one remembered the steep sides of the canyon as they descended them on one side and ascended them on the other to the point where they now were standing.

The deceptive look of the trees beneath them; the

entire arrangement of the scenic effects showed them to their minds, that Clen and Dix had dashed themselves to death.

"They killed themselves rather than get into trouble with us and put up a ransom," shuddered Adele, her eyes cloudy with thought. "Those men have sand!"

To a girl like Adele the possession of personal courage called in America "sand" is something to be more admired than brains; out there courage was needed more than brains; an ounce of physical strength was better than an ounce of brains in coping with mere physical conditions as the trackless North-West always holds.

But Adele while admiring courage had some brains of her own. She called her husband over to her.

"Look here, you," she cried, with the white woman's contempt after all for the red-man even if he was her Lord and master. "What d'y think of that jump?"

"Both dead. Heap jump it. Canyon damn deep there," Orlando said.

"Ugh!" cried Wild Dog. "I go see."

With extreme caution Wild Dog began to let himself down over the brink of the canyon, hanging on to shrubs, and trees, and going down gingerly lest he lose his footing and fall to the ground, which he assumed was many thousand feet, more or less, below him.

"I think those chaps aren't dead," remarked Adele to her submissive husband who hardly dared say his soul was his own half the time, and whose name the girl would not bear, calling herself always Adele Vattmare.

"Why, eh?"

"That chap Clen is a pretty likely fellow. I wish I'd met him before I married you—I'd never married you!"

Olancho scowled but being used to these little family jars said nothing.

"I wish you had met him," he growled to himself.

"Don't get surly," sneered Adele. "You aren't so many for a husband as you think. If there's anything meaner than an Injun I'd like to see him at that!"

"Or meaner than a white wife," put up the Indian, now thoroughly angry.

Adele calmly leaned forward and slapped her liege lord's face.

"Shut up!" she said. "I hate to hear you open your face."

Except to shrug his shoulders the Indian made no movement; he knew he was helpless. An angry woman has the best man in the world at a disadvantage.

"You listen to me," said Adele. "Those men knew what they were about—I will bet that the chap Clen knew what he was doing——"

A wild cry from the scout Wild Dog came up from below.

Then the branches of a stunted maple parted and there stood the Indian his head only a few feet away.

"What d' y' think of that?" gasped Adele. "I knew it! Those trees shielded us from knowing that the canyon here peaked a hill and that those men were only risking a fall of a few feet."

Adele's intelligence told her that undoubtedly the two men had in some way or other had knowledge of the fact that they were not jumping to death.

"Not such a sandy man as I thought," she sneered. "But he knows how to get out of a hard hole. Why

didn't I see this first? The men have escaped easily by this time."

Adele knew that Clen and Dix in some way would free themselves from their bonds and escape.

"Why didn't I kill them both when I had the drop on them," she whispered to herself. "It beats all what a heart I've got!"

"You big fool! You tink white man u-i-c-e. So you don't k-e-e-l him q-u-e-e-k," cried Adele's husband. "You now have to f-ig-h-t white man. He s-o-o-n know everything."

Adele's eyes darkened with hate and rage.

"That's the trouble! We aren't safe a minute. He'll find out our secrets——"

"Shet up," cried Olancho. "Don't say n-u-t-t-i-n. Can't a-f-f-o-r-d to t-a-k-e chanst. Do n-o-t even t-a-l-k of dem tings! D-a-n-g-e-r even to t-a-l-k of that ting!"

Adele nodded.

The mysteries of the midnight assassins must not be talked about.

That she knew.

Nor must they be discovered by the two enterprising young men.

That she knew also.

There were some things that had better be kept a close secret by the few members of the Vattmare band, the girl knew, and she knew further that if the secret was discovered, the power of the family would be broken forever and there would be only one course to take; either to die in the defence of the secret or to run away as fast as circumstances would permit.

"Or," thought Adele, "to murder the two skunks that I had in the hollow of my hands. What a fool I've been!"

This by the way is what one always says—afterward!

"Come on," cried Adele to her husband, as she rushed down the ascent to the side of Wild Dog, who showed her how easy after all the two men had escaped.

"No fall 'tall," grunted Wild Dog.

"Not over ten feet," speculated Adele.

"Easy people we were to let 'em get away with it," sneered the girl.

"Chumps!" growled Olancho who had joined the company.

"Dey smart men," suggested Wild Dog.

"Too smart for us. If we don't get them they'll break up housekeeping for the tribe of Vattmare, I just guess."

This remark was greeted by sage shaking of the head by the two Indians.

"Well, it's up to us," remarked Adele. "If we don't get those men it's up to them to get us—any trail there Wild Dog?"

This question was asked of the Indian who was covering the ground like a pointer dog in his anxiety to find which way Clen and Dix had gone.

"Ugh!" cried the Indian at length. "I find heap trail."

He rushed forward as he spoke followed by the remainder of his thug party.

"Look," cried Adele, "there's where they went—see?"

"Y-ep!" cried Olancho. "Broad trail show."

All went well until the party darted around the turn of the rocks where Clen and Dix had met Kayamon Vattmare.

The aged ruffian had just returned to earth.

His thoughts had been wool-gathering owing to the tremendous blow he had received.

He was kicking his legs like a gigantic straddle-bug hither and thither in an effort to get up.

"A man!" cried Adele as she halted and gazed ahead as she saw the struggling form. "Then the man is hurt—no, he isn't, why, it's dad!"

Adele gave a shriek of surprise echoed by her husband and Wild Dog.

She ran hurriedly forward with the Indians a heap good second.

"By—," cried Olancho, "it is the old man!"

These loud shouts were the ones Clen and Dix heard above their heads as the two men peered down in hopes of seeing their pursuers.

"U-r-g-h! Where am I?" gurgled Kayamon Vattemare as he felt of his nose. "What happened? Did the sky tumble in?"

"No," his dutiful daughter replied. "You old skate some one hit you in the nose!"

"Naw," the old outlaw replied. "No one hit me. Sky fell in."

Olancho grinned and winked at Wild Dog.

"If the sky hit you, it hit you on your nose," remarked Adele. "I never saw a bigger trunk out of a circus among the elephants. It's a beaut!"

Kayamon laughed in spite of himself as he shut one eye and peered at his nose which indeed was a muchly abused organ.

"I remember two young men comin' a runnin' down th' canyon," the aged thug muttered.

"One tall, the other a little shorter?" queried Adele.

"Yep!"

"Then what happened?"

"I hed me gun up and some one took it from me by dodgin' under et. Then th' sky fell. Hokey Snakes, I never seen a sky tumble in th' way thet did."

"You're crazy! The sky didn't fall. What happened was that the young men—one or both—handed you one rtraight from the shoulder—and there you are."

"There I was," said Kayamon as he glanced at the dent his prostrate form had made in the earth. "But I'm up now. Here I am!"

The aged pirate looked at his nose now in horror. His wits were coming back and he shook his fist and danced in rage.

"I'll have the blood of the man that hit me," Kayamon howled, and this was no idle threat coming from a man with his record of blood. "I'll kill him on sight! One o' you fellers gimme gun."

Olancho shoved a beautiful magazine .45 in the old man's hand.

Kayamon had fully regained his senses now and was looking for trouble.

"Come on," he shrieked as he rushed down the trail after the fleeing white-men, bound to take their lives if he could find them.

The party came at halt when they had reached the tree where the ruse of Clen and Dix had been tried in the hopes of evading the party of thugs.

The effort only checked the advance.

Wild Dog, who was the scout for the bandit quartette, soon penetrated the story of the trail and the attempt of Dix and Clen to mislead him.

"Ugh!" he cried. "This way!"

Thus it was that the outlaws began ascending the steep again, and thus it was that Dix took a shot at Wild Dog, which that worthy received smack in his shoulder.

A steel-nosed bullet of heavy caliber even in the shoulder of an Indian produces much confusion and as Wild Dog threw his arms in the air and spun around on his heel by the impact of the shot, he was "out" in a second.

The white-men did not await the further onslaught of the enemy.

Instead they charged head down through the forest back to where their horses were and in a trifling length of time were away and retracing their steps on horse-back toward Herschel Island, while behind they could hear the shrieks of vengeance of the robber-band.

"Ta! Ta!" cried Dix as he waved his hand at the form of Adele who was sending ineffectual shot in the direction of the two fleeing men.

"Well, I'll wager that we will see that girl later, eh?" added Clen.

They did under more startling circumstances!

CHAPTER VIII.

A STAGE-COACH HOLD-UP.

The stage-coach that runs between the point where the passengers take a boat at Herschel Island for Fort Andrews, eighty miles away, runs through the hamlet of White Horse Rapids.

That is, it runs through the hamlet of Vattemare, for there's no one in the hamlet hardly, save the outlaw and his band.

For reasons best known to himself Kayamon Vattemare did not wish to hold up the coach in spite of the fact that it was filled with treasures usually in the way of money and gold dust, because the outlaw knew that the stage-coach company would pursue a road agent to his grave, but they would get him.

They had to do this because if they did not they would be "held-up" right along.

It was this reason that let the coach by the Vattemare game when it made its regular weekly trip.

In winter the coach became a dog sled, and took no passengers and only run when it could.

In summer it ran quite regularly, although the line had queer motive power for sometimes it did its business by canoes; sometimes by fur packets on devious rivers, sometimes by dog sleds, sometimes by stage-coaches so that no travelers over the line from Fort Andrews up could have any kick coming on methods of travelling.

They had everything even to walking, save steam locomotives! and any way it was fun.

On the coach this trip was the driver Sammy Drake, who by the way, was different from most stage-coach drivers; he knew how to talk the English language.

There was also a boy, Harry Willis, in search of adventure and dearly buying it at the expenditure of much of his father's cash.

He was 17 years old, from Boston, and knew a thing or two about the East if not much about the North-West.

There was no one else in the coach this trip, so just as it was wheeling into Vattemare its driver Sammy Drake was considerably surprised to have a tall man with a bit of cloth on his face for a mask, with places

slit for seeing and breathing; his coat turned wrongside out and a big gun in his hands, pop out of the bushes.

"Now, then?" the Road Agent cried. "Hands up!"

The celerity with which Sammy Drake and Harry Willis pierced the air with their outstretched hands was a caution.

"Ha! Ha!" cried the boy. "This is dead funny!"

"Shut up!" snapped the outlaw. "If you don't, I'll make you food for worms."

"Angle or death?" asked the boy.

Sammy Drake smiled.

But in a low tone he admonished the boy.

"Be careful! Some of these Road Agents shoot quick."

"Let him shoot," replied the boy. "He can't shoot me but once if he does it quick. What I'm laughing at is the fact that I'm flat broke. I haven't got a cent—and me diamonds are in pawn!"

"What!" cried the Road Agent. "Nuttin' from ye fer me?"

"Naw," rejoined the boy, Harry Willis, "nuttin, as you put it, unless you want to eat me. I'm stone broke."

"How about you, Sammy D——" questioned the Road Agent.

"Me? Oh, I ain't got nothing," rejoined Sammy. "I blew my roll in at faro before I left Herschel Landing with this coach."

The outlaw swore in his throat.

"How about the treasure box?" he yelled. "Sling that out. It's got money, hasn't it in it?"

"N-o-o. You're in wrong this trip!" calmly replied Sammy. "There ain't a cent in the treasure box this trip. They decided not to send any stuff this trip for the reason that the gold-dust has been all absorbed up at the Island. In fact there ain't no dust there. There ain't no bills. There ain't nothing at all."

"What?" yelled the outlaw.

"That's it!" cried Sammy. "There ain't enough stuff in this trip to pay the horses' feed. We only make it in hopes of doing some biz on the up trip."

The bandit's language was dreadful.

"Have I got here an' been stuck up like a fool," he said, "instead of sticking up you people at this gun's mouth?"

"You have," briefly rejoined Sammy.

"Is there no cash on the coach?"

"Not a sue markee!"

"Is there nothing in any of your pockets?"

"Nothing," replied Sammy.

"Not a penny," added Harry Willis.

There was the merry tinkle of a woman's voice.

The party turned their eyes to the road-side where stood, gracefully leaning upon her rifle, the beautiful form and face of Adele Vattemare, the wife of Olancha, The Spear, laughing in great merriment.

"Do you suppose that if there had ever been a chance to get away with anything on this coach that I would not have taken it?" the girl cried gaily. "Who is this outsider that comes here, any way, in our territory? Is there no honor among thieves?"

"Not a bit," cried the bandit. "Rattlesnake Hank would run away with Adele Vattemare any time in spite of her having a husband," cried the bandit Road Agent.

Adele showed her pretty teeth.

"Providing Adele would run," she snapped. "Which she won't. You're a fresh guy!"

"Not as fresh as the charming Adele," mocked the Road Agent. "If she doesn't care, I'll order this coach to go onward, because you can't get money out of a stone or a couple of fellers like that baby up there and Sammy Drake."

There was an explosion from Harry Willis.

He blew up like a red-hot boiler.

"I ain't no *baby*!" he cried. "Come down and I'll show you any time in old Boston that I ain't!"

Adele laughed.

"Cute kid, isn't he?" she said. "I'm half in love with him."

Rattlesnake Hank waved his revolver at Sammy Drake.

"Drive on," he cried. "I'm going to keep all people, this gal would fall in love with off the job—she can't be in love with her husband—he's an Indian!"

Adele's eyes snapped.

The stage-coach started away, while Sammy Drake and Harry Willis gleefully shook each other by the hands.

"Wow! Aint I the candy kid!" cried Harry as he took a big roll of bills out of his pocket. "Dad sent me this pelf before I left Herschel Landing. Say, if there isn't a couple of thou' here I'm a goat!"

"Ha!" cried Sammy. "Likewise Ho! Say, Kid, there's at least ten thou' in gold dust right in that treasure box and I've got a couple of thou' of my own stacked away besides in a belt about my waist. Wow! We get away for it!"

"That's a bum Road Agent," cried Harry in disgust. "He took our word for it and not once put up a holler and tried to see if we were lying."

Sammy winked.

"Seemed t' me," he said, "the Road Agent was busier admiring Adele Vattemare than he was lookin' fer gold—say, he's plumb crazy! She's meaner than the Injun hubby she has and he is the meanest thing on this earth. Say, they both have notorious tempers!"

With this remark the stage-coach went on unrobbed.

A remarkable record—but there was a secret reason why it was not robbed, deeper than even Sammy Drake and Harry Willis knew.

This reason will develop later.

As the unrobbed coach drove on the outlaw who called himself Rattlesnake Hank was busily engaged in talking to Adele Vattemare.

"Well," he said, "this outlawing isn't much good any more. I ain't got a good thing in so long——" he shook his head in sadness.

"What's the matter—broke?" queried Adele.

The outlaw pulled out a big roll of bills.

The top one was a hundred dollar one.

There were hundreds in the pile the girl saw.

Then there were tens and twenties and other bills, too numerous to mention in the pile.

It took the girl's breath away and her eyes sparkled.

"Gee whiz!" she said. "What a roll! It'd choke a cow!"

"My, I wished I had a bigger one than that," said Rattlesnake Hank.

"Why?"

"Because I'd be able to get another nice sparkle from your bright eyes when you looked at it."

"How you flatter! That's all that can make my eyes sparkle!"

"Good! Then you stick to me and we'll both wear diamonds. I'm ready money and can make your eyes sparkle every day in the week."

"Don't let Olancho hear you talking that way to me. He's pretty handy with weapons."

"I don't care how handy he is. He can't keep his wife from liking to look at my money."

The girl smiled.

"Well now," she said, "Where did you get that cash?"

"Same old way."

"How was that?"

"Hold-ups, gamblin' robberies—you ought to know me!"

"I suppose I had, but I don't."

"I'm Rattlesnake Hank."

"Who's he?"

"Pretty well known gun-man and outlaw up at Nome, on the Alaska side."

"You may be, but I don't know as I've ever heard of you."

"You would have if I'd known how very bright your eyes were."

"Oh, drop that! Tell me why you are here?"

"I came to hold up that coach."

"Where from?"

"Nome."

"Well, you might as well stayed away for all the good it did you."

"Oh, I got what I was after."

"What was it?"

"Information."

"What was the information?"

"That the big gold from the upper North-West Yukon territory diggings hasn't come over yet."

"Over in the coach?"

"Yes."

"Didn't know that it ever went by here in the coach."

"Say, you're a fine lot of outlaws! Why, that's the cream cheese of the year! It's a melon worth cutting. Say, gal, you're behind the times! Your old man ain't no good—and an Injun husband! Say, what?"

Adele grew angry at once.

"You're the most impudent man I ever met," she cried. "What right have you any way to come here and talk this way to me?"

"What right have you to call yourself an outlaw and let good things get by you the way you're doing. You make me weary!"

"What good things?"

"The coach—and fifty thousand dollars in dust on it in its treasure box, and gold and silver in bars, wuth fifty thousand more—say, gal, you liked my bank roll, think what it would wind up, eh? Say, you an' I'd be happy fer life on our share!"

Adele's color deepened. She surely was extremely pretty.

"Say, we never heard of all this? We didn't know there was enough gold dust hereabouts to make a ring for a child."

"I suppose not. Say, gal, they keep it dead secret up at Herschel Island that this is so. The Hudson's Bay Company don't let on that there's a speck of gold being bought by them! The Eskimos know all about it,

though. They bring in the stuff in soap boxes. Now, I'm going ter git th' coach thet hez it ef it takes me a year."

"Oh!"

"I suppose you know that the coach I just let go had probably ten or fifteen thou' on it—that ain't what I wanted."

"Most outlaws would be satisfied with that much."

"Y-a-ss. But you know well as I do that the first time the coach is really robbed is the last whack I'll get at her. The man that robs this hyar coach has got to skip the minnite he has robbed the thing. For as soon as there's a warnin' to the Stage Company, they'll start t' git that feller; and git him they will if he ain't fly!"

"That's why we've kept our hands off the coach for so many years."

"I twig. Wall, ter give you no guff, I've fixed up a deal wharby me and my partner is going to rob this hyar coach th' next trip down."

"Your partner?"

The girl's eyes were suspicious.

"You bet!"

"What's his name?"

"Short Card Tommy."

"A skin gambler, is Short Card Tommy?"

"Better not say that—to your everlastin' good I tell ye!"

"Why not?"

"Because Tommy is a short-card man all right. If there's any aces in the pack he'll hold em out fer himself, hence his name Short Card. Every deck he deals with is short some cards, all right, when he gets through a gamblin' game, but say, he is squeamish about any one's tellin' him thet. I've seen him shoot up a whole compn'y fer telling him he was a 'skin-gambler' an' ef y' should say it t' him he might fergit yer a pretty gal."

"Oh, let up on my looks! Say, where's this fighting partner of ours?"

For answer Rattlesnake Hank whistled long and shrill.

A face unmasked stuck itself out of the bushes.

It was the face of a man with a beard, close cut, black and with a huge pair of old fashioned moustaches.

He was dressed like Rattlesnake Hank, in an old suit of clothes, patched and dirty, held up by a strong belt in which bristled some very fine revolvers, like Rattlesnake's of high power.

His hair was long and he looked a broken down "sport," and outlaw to perfection.

"Whadeyewant," Short Card Tommy asked in a deep snarling voice.

"You!"

"Whatdyelet the coach gofer?" asked Short Card Tommy who evidently had a habit of running his words all in together.

"Tell y' some time—I want you to be introduced t' me nex' wife?"

"Haw! Haw! Howdoyou do—what?" cried Short Card with a low wave of his time-stained sombrero.

Short Card then pulled another bigger roll of bills from his pocket.

"I'll bet you fifty dollars," said Short Card, "that you're in wrong!"

"He is all right," cried Adele. "He's a chump from

the word go. One hubby is all that I can stand for—although I'll agree that I wish I was single again!"

The two road-agents roared.

"That's the talk! However, I'll stop joking now," cried Rattlesnake Hank. "In fact I'll tell you what I'm here for besides the holding up of the coach."

"What is it?" queried Adele now all curiosity.

"I want to know if there's any chance to git ye and yer crowd interested in my outlaw plans?"

"You mean to hold up the coach when it's going through with the treasure next week?" shrewdly asked Adele.

"That's what I mean!"

Adele turned the question over in her active mind. She knew the situation of her father, her husband and herself.

If they remained longer in the territory things might be made too hot for them.

Then there was the mystery that she had the key to—and, then there was the question of the *Arctic Star* and the two owners of the craft, Clen Slade and Dix Squire, who had escaped the earnest search of herself, Olancho, and Wild Dog.

Would not Slade and Squire bring down upon them the entire *Arctic Star* company? If so, her old father, herself, and the two Indians were hardly able to cope with the mariners; here seemed to be raised up two outlaws, desperate men, and they would any way add to the fighting force that might have to meet the sailors. It would do no harm to temporize.

"Look here," Adele announced. "You fellows can talk it over with dad—perhaps. You stay here and I'll go and see dad. I'll be back in an hour. Possibly he may want to talk to you. Will you fellows wait here?"

There was a queer gleam in the eyes of Rattlesnake Hank which was answered by a stranger glint in the eyes of Short Card Tommy as Adele spoke.

"Sure we will wait," cried Rattlesnake Hank, "if you get a move on y'gal."

The two outlaws sat down on a log to await Adele's return as the girl vanished in the trees.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PLOT REVEALED.

Rattlesnake Hank and Short Card Tommy sat like stones until the last sound of the steps and progress of the hurrying girl was followed by the silence of the woods.

Then Hank winked at Tommy.

"Good work, boy!" he said in the well known accents of Clen Slade.

Tommy, no other than Dix Squire, twisted his face up into a knot and whistled.

"She fell for it, all right," Dix said. "Say, I didn't think our old hunting suits would go over this way. My, what a fierce outlaw you were—are, I mean! A little bit of a walnut, and a little bit of water make a great dye—say, your own mother wouldn't know you."

"That false beard looks like the real thing. To say nothing of the hair that goes with it. By crickets, you're the goods, all right!"

Clen smiled.

"If we ain't the two dandy outlaws," he remarked. "Didn't I hold up that coach in good shape?"

"You did it with a professional air truly commendable."

"I was scart half out of my wits fearing that we would have to rob the coach in case Sammy Drake flung the treasure box at us."

"Sassy kid, that boy was with Sammy."

"That's right. I knew the boy well last winter. He was on our ship a lot of times."

"So was Sammy. I've taken many a dollar off him at draw-poker last winter but he never tumbled to us."

"If he did he didn't give in to it and let us know. I tell you I didn't think it required so much sand to stand out and say 'Hold up your hands' in a gruff tone, but it does! You know what you've got to do in the way of shooting when you say that, if the passengers or guard *don't* fling up their hands and I was scared all right for fear they wouldn't and I'd have to shoot. It would mean you know that if I didn't shoot I'd get shot for Sammy Drake is quick on the draw, you see, and I was in a blue haze while I was sticking that gun out at the coach—say, I sweat blood for a few minutes!"

"He! He! Then that infernal she-devil of a woman showed up. Where did you think she came from?"

"I'm a goat if I know! We chased back over the trail on our horses put up this plot and danced back here. They must have tried to follow us, made up their minds that we escaped and then started back, the girl coming on us when we were trying to hold up the coach."

"That was probably it. You jollied her all right. That bank-roll was a fine bluff. Yes, it was a good bluff."

"Wasn't it? To a girl like Adele money is the quickest lure. She hadn't seen so much ready cash in years. I'll bet! I flashed the roll like a millionaire."

"Lucky we took the greater part of our roll on the *Arctic Star*. We played it in to some purpose and when I saw out of the bushes what you were doing and let the girl see my roll, say, she was like a tiger. Did you notice her eyes shine?"

"I did! Now there's one healthy fact you can bank on."

"What's that?"

"This girl is going to take us back to her daddie."

"Don't think so."

"Beg to differ from you. She is!"

"Put up a reason and I'll change my verdict."

"The roll's going to do it."

"How?"

"If they don't make up their minds that they will go on with us in the raid of the coach when it goes by next week they'll pretend they will."

"Oh!"

"So they can get the two nice little bank rolls. It ain't so hard to murder us in our sleep as it looks. No one ever heard of us here. Rattlesnake Hank and Short Card Tommy aren't known in their criminal world. They are supposed to be a couple of strong-armed men from Nome, over in the United States side of this uncanny part of the world. Why, 'twould be easy to do us up as we slept don't you know, but when I sleep *you* don't you short-card gambler and when *you* sleep I don't. Are you next?"

"You bet. The fellow that is awake fingers his gun all the while and don't turn his head to eject any tobacco juice he has in his mouth."

"You're in it I see! They are pretty dangerous people to deal with and the act of cutting a throat isn't

so dead hard as one would think out here—it would be safe enough to do it. Who'd ever know? Who'd ever look up a couple of dead outlaws as we are supposed to be?"

The two desperate young adventurers laughed at each other grimly.

"Nice dangerous little game we are up against, isn't it?" suggested Dix.

"Plenty much excitement in this for ours. But I'm going after the loot of that gang."

"Going to run away with the girl?"

"Heaven forbid! I'd rather elope with a tiger."

"You certainly made her think you were clean gone over her."

"Yep! Part of the campaign."

"If she tells hubby the Injun he'll make you look like one of those things they steam cabbage in."

"A colander?"

"That's it. Dinner wouldn't be bad for me now. I'd eat cabbage and a bit of corned beef with pleasure."

"I haven't had anything but cold sandwiches since we left the ship. Sandwiches wit' pig in between as the 'witch' ain't bad for awhile but I'd hate to look a decent hog in the face."

"Judging from the present price of pork you would find it an expensive proposition to look any hog in the face—look out! Here comes your charmer Adele at a good swift canter. Seems a pity such a pretty girl is married to a red Indian."

"No accounting for tastes said the pretty gal when she kissed the cow."

"Shut up! Here she is."

Adele spoke as soon as she was in hailing distance.

"The old man said that if you'd come to the shack he'd talk things over with you," Adele remarked.

"How's hubby?" asked Clen, falling back into his disguise as Rattlesnake Hank. "Is he anxious to see me?"

"Hubby appears to trouble you a heap more than he does me," Adele remarked.

"There's some wives that ain't never much put out by a hubby," said Dix as he toyed with his Short Card Tommy make-up.

"You're fresh, aren't you?" asked Adele.

"Like lettuce."

"Or grass," remarked Rattlesnake Hank.

Adele laughed at the two men.

"I don't know much about general outlaws," she said, "but you are two merry guys, only you don't string me as much as you think you do."

The girl led the way rapidly to a trail through the woods.

Her agile form flitted ahead so rapidly that Clen and Dix had to work hard to keep up with her.

At the end of a mile of stiff climbing they all came out into a beautiful valley.

It was sunk in a sort of crater like depression.

In the bottom of the depression was a spring of water. It bubbled up cool and inviting. The spring ran over and made a clear little brook that ran right down the hill to a point about half a mile away where it settled itself once and for all in the river which here began boiling and tumbling over the rocks in the well known White Horse Rapids.

The Mackenzie River, in itself a noble stream, and its great fall of water in a narrow canyon with huge

rocks over which the water seethed and bubbled made a fine display.

"Pretty place this," remarked Rattlesnake Hank. "Sylvan scene. Wood nymph at my elbow, Satyr coming here in guise of red-man hubby. Great place for a honeymoon—say, what's your name, gal?"

"Adele."

"Well, Adele, what's the cigar store Injun's name coming here towards us?"

"Olancho, my husband."

"Nice name. Name got the owner beat, hasn't it? Well, Mrs. Olancho, introduce me t' the noble red-man."

The introduction was made and Olancho, who had no knowledge of the coming of the two men, was a shade more impassive than ever.

He was a true red-man and did not let what he thought appear upon his face.

"This is Wild Dog," added Adele as that Indian started forward with his left arm in a sling, and his shoulder done up, showing where the bullet that Dix fired at him had taken effect.

"Bunged up, eh?" pleasantly said Short Card Tommy.

"Ugh!" replied Wild Dog.

"Gun fight?"

"Yep."

"Git t'other chap?"

"Naw."

"Thet's bad! Git him some other time, eh?"

"Ugh!"

Wild Dog snarled and walked away.

"Pleasant time a-comin, fer feller thet shot up your Wild Dog, Adele. What kind of a dog is he? French poodle or fox hound?"

"Bloodhound!"

"Dangerous beast to put about with. You'd better muzzle that fellow."

"Hadn't you better try it?" asked Adele with a smirk.

"I ain't hankerin' fer the job," replied Rattlesnake Hank. "Only man I'm after is your lord and master. I'd like to make a charming widow of you."

"Wish you would," whispered Adele with a shrewd glance at Rattlesnake Hank.

"I will," that worthy said as he winked at Dix.

"My, but you're going some," said Short Card Tommy with a lifting of the eyebrows.

"Here's dad," remarked Adele calmly as she motioned to Short Card Tommy to leave Rattlesnake Hank and Kayamon Vattermare together.

The old outlaw looked at Rattlesnake Hank with two bright and inquiring eyes.

What he thought was not shown by his face.

Rattlesnake Hank tried hard to get at the mind of the old man by a crafty search of his countenance.

Vattermare broke the silence.

"You two men are of our kind?" he asked in a hoarse growling voice.

"We are."

"You are from Nome?"

"Yes."

"When did you leave there?"

"Three months ago."

"Why?"

"Place got too hot."

"Strong-arm work?"

"Somewhat."

"Police after you?"
 "In droves."
 "Had hard time in skipping them?"
 "Hardest ever! They chased us far over the border into British North-America."
 "Oh!"
 "You have heard our plans from your daughter?"
 "Yes."
 "What do you think of them?"
 "Good—if they work. No good—if they don't."
 "Do you declare yourself in on the pot?"
 "Can't say yet. Got to have more light."
 "All right. We are here to give it."
 "Why did you seek us out?"
 "Ha! Where did you hear of us?"
 "At Herschel Island."
 "Oh! What was asserted about us there?"
 "Oh, a lot of people said that you were the worst thief in the territory."
 "Did, eh? What did you think of that statement?"
 "Thought it was true. If it hadn't been and you're an honest man, I'm in wrong."
 Kayamon Vattemare laughed.
 "Well, I guess you ain't in wrong. I'm a thief all right!"
 "I don't know. I'm not so crooked that I'd lie crooked in a bed, but I'm some on annexing other people's cash."
 Both of the men grinned in sympathy.
 "I like your plan," suddenly said Vattemare.
 "Good!"
 "I think you can make it stick."
 "So do I."
 "There's only one thing agin it thet I see."
 "What's that?"
 "The get away."
 "Oh, that's easy."
 "Don't be too sure."
 "My plan is to rob the coach and hustle back to the forest about a hundred miles."
 "Ah!"
 "Your Injun people probably know the woods and can take us where we are safe from pursuit."
 "They know the woods all right! I think they might lead us where the hand or foot of a white man has never been seen. There's many such places within a hundred miles of here."
 "Excellent! You see that's why I came to you. I can stick up the coach and get the boodle but getting off with it through these wildernesses isn't so easy after all."
 "I understand."
 "So I'll tell you what I'll do."
 "What is it?"
 "To show I mean biz, my side partner and I will hold up the coach far enough down the road from here so that you won't be implicated."
 "Oh! Are you telling me the truth?"
 "I thought it was true. I wouldn't have been here if it wasn't."
 "Oh! You're complimentary about our band."
 "I'm trying to be. They also said at Herschel Island that your daughter was the limit, and her husband worse than the limit. They classed her husband Olancho and Wild Dog in the class of thieving Injuns."
 Vattemare's eyes snapped.
 "Dare you say this to my face?"

"Sur-lee. After having said it I thus show you why I came to you, being of the same kidney, only not so well known. I don't want an honest man, or a timid thief to help me rob a coach—see?"

Vattemare nodded.

"It takes a brave man to come here and say what you have to me," he remarked.

"And a braver to try and make love to Olancho's wife," put in the voice of Adele. "I think, pop, that when we stack up against a man like this we had better go in with him. There's money in him."

"How about our getaway?" asked the old man.

"We can talk it all over later," remarked Adele. "The Indians can help us there. Olancho knows these forests like a book."

"Come on, Hank, it's all settled. Come and talk the matter over with me," the girl said as she indifferently passed her husband, who looked at her calmly with an ominous sparkle in his eyes, however.

CHAPTER X.

THE MYSTERY OF THE CAVERN.

"Do you think we can get away?" asked Adele.

"You and I might. I don't care about the others," replied Rattlesnake Hank as the couple sat down on a log near the encampment in the hush of early evening.

"Bosh! I know you're not serious!"

"Don't you believe it. If you will become a widow I'd be glad to marry you."

The girl laughed.

"May be I'll try you out some time on that proposition."

"How?"

"It's easy out here to get rid of a hubby."

"That's right."

"What are you going to do with the big bank roll you have?"

"Spend it—want an Easter bonnet?"

"Where can you get one here?"

"Here isn't the only spot on earth."

"True! There's always a somewhere else."

"You'll have to hunt it before the hold-up comes off."

"Why, fair girl?"

"No taffy! But I'll tell you if you'll answer me a question."

"Go ahead."

"About how many cartridges for revolvers and rifles do you and Short Card Tommy possess?"

"About twenty-five rounds for each weapon."

"If it rains—why, you'll get wet."

"Don't see the connection in that remark."

"Simply this—you've got enough ammunition to hold up the coach, but how about three months' traveling in the heart of the wilderness to get away with this stuff we are going to get? We can't quit under three months from hiding out in the bushes?"

"That's right!"

"How long will your cartridges last when divided into three months?"

Rattlesnake Hank looked very grave. It did seem to him that things were going queerly fine for his side.

He had tried hard to see how it was that he could send back to the *Arctic Star* for help, and here this girl was giving him the chance he looked for.

"Wow! Thet's bad," Hank cried. "Say, I've got a plan."

"What is it?"

"Send back to Herschel Island for the cartridges."

The girl thought it all over and saw that in a way the plan was a good one.

"I like your plan—but who would you send?" she asked. "No one of our gang can go. There might be a shooting up if any of us went. We are as popular as a skunk at a camp meeting at Herschel Island."

"Don't any one know me or my partner. If it weren't for your bright eyes I might go."

"What's my bright eyes got to do with it?"

"Going to bask in their light."

"Stuff! Why don't you send Short Card Tommy?"

Rattlesnake Hank feared that the gleam in his eyes might put the girl "wise to the fact that he was leading her forward." He snickered and said that the girl's plan might do.

"Y-e-s," he added. "It will do all right. That plan might do—well, I will talk it over with Tommy. Bye by, sweetheart."

"Go on," cried the girl with a languishing glance.

So Clen in the guise of Rattlesnake Hank strode away.

"If Olancho isn't careful," he smiled to himself, "he will wake up a corpse, ha, ha. It seems to me that my bank roll is talking widowhood to that girl faster than my blandishments. I shouldn't wonder if she would play Lady Macbeth and kill a few herself. In her mind Olancho the Injun husband stands alone between her and my bank roll. Hey, Tommy!"

Dix Squire slouched over in the guise of Short Card Tommy, outlaw from Nome, and side-partner of Clen Slade, *alias* Rattlesnake Hank.

In a few brief words he told of the cartridge shortage.

"Well, if they haven't got bullets they can't shoot us," laughed Tommy.

"That's right! But you've got to go back to the ship and get some cartridges."

"And leave you to the pleasant pastimes of facing a jealous Indian husband, and the wife who is bound to get your bank roll by murder of you or hubby, no matter which comes first? Nit!"

"Don't you worry about me. I can take care of myself all right. What you are to do is to get busy. Hike back to the *Arctic Star*. Hustle for all you're worth. Take one of the hosses. Ride like John Gilpin. See?"

"Yep, I see. Then what?"

"You bring back a lot of cartridges. Tell any old story you feel like as to getting them. Don't get back too quick or they won't think you hoofed it. The gang hasn't got any hosses—say, you pretend to steal a hoss in Herschel Landing. That's the place where you get the fur-packet over to Herschel Island, and bring it back. That will account for a quick trip. You ought to be back here in four days. The coach won't be back in ten—it has to go up and then come back, here, you know, with that treasure. And say——"

Clen lowered his voice.

"Hee! Hee!" cried Dix. "Say, that's the best ever. Say, it's fine! What a plot you have put up. I'll do it for you. My, won't the boys laugh at the *Arctic Star*. That's the best plot I ever heard of, now isn't it?"

"I think it some plot. Now skip. Get back quick—and don't forget the plot part. If you don't get back quick that gang will get me. I don't want to be murdered here, thank you. So hurry."

Dix turned on his heel and started back for Herschel Island.

He was cautious and walked in the middle of the road so as to write. He knew what assassination meant in that part of the world.

He had not been gone ten minutes brisk walking when he saw Wild Dog prowling along the forest glade parallel to him.

"So they've sent that thieving red devil after me, eh?" Dix muttered. "To see if I'm on the level, eh?"

Dix plunged into the woods at right angles to the trail and slowly began to circle around so that he could get behind Wild Dog without the Indian's knowing the fact.

"I'll settle that chap quick," cried Dix to himself.

The matter now became a case of pursuit.

On the one hand Wild Dog thought he was pursuing Short Card Tommy unseen, while Short Card Tommy knew that he was pursuing Wild Dog unseen.

Matters in this position drifted along for several hours, as Dix was careful to make his circles wide and separate from each other.

While the Indian outlaw and the pretended outlaw were thus trying to try each other's purpose out, Clen still in his Rattlesnake Hank garb, had returned to the girl, Adele.

"Sweetheart," the young man cried, "I've sent after cartridges."

The girl smiled.

"You're a rusher all right," she cried. "You don't have to be shown. You see things quick."

"Sure!"

"Well, there's one thing more that I'm going to show you of our plans here and I think they are pretty good ones," the girl said. "Are you ready?"

"Yep."

Adele hesitated.

She did not see her husband's head sticking out from a clump of thickets near at hand or the hatred and rage that his face showed when he saw her talking with Rattlesnake Hank, the outlaw.

If ever a face meant murder it was the face of Olancho, the Spear.

Adele continued.

"Well," she said. "There isn't much more to say. I'm going to tell you a great secret."

"Go on."

"I can't tell you because first I must show you."

"Very good, I'm willing to be shown."

The girl silently led her white admirer to a trail that ran through the woods.

"Come on," she remarked.

"You lead the way."

"Will you follow me?"

"To a hotter place than you probably will take me," cried the man.

The way was rough and for ten or fifteen minutes the couple scrambled on breathlessly.

Then Adele stopped.

"Here is the mystery I am going to let you in on," the girl said.

"I don't know why you should?"

"Neither do I, except that in doing it I'm letting you in to our gang's secrets. It's time if we all hook up interests that you know how we get to our plunder and what we do with it, when we get it."

"Hum!"

"You see how things are? If we are to escape from here we have much to do. My husband is a good Injun, but unfortunately he is an Injun and don't see things in white ways. The same can be said of Wild Dog. Dad's too old to do business with any of us. He still holds nominal leadership in the family—but I have to do all the planning."

"Tell me why you married an Indian?"

"My dear man, when a girl is eighteen—I was eighteen when I married, even a red Injun looks romantic to her. But a girl soon wakes up. You can't mix red ways and white ways—and—well, never mind."

A gleam of merriment came over the face of Clen.

"This part of the plot works all right," he thought. "I fear me we will have some kind of an explosion soon."

Adele knelt down before a great stone.

To outward appearances the stone was part of the hill itself.

But the girl grasped one corner of it, gave a downward jerk and the stone slid away showing a ladder leading down into darkness.

There came an infernal roaring and bellowing from the interior of the cavern disclosed by the open space.

"What makes the roaring?" asked the man.

"There is a story there that the *Spectre of Thunderbolt Cavern* makes these strange noises. They say that there's a ghost in Thunderbolt Cavern. If it is, it's a pretty substantial one."

"Pretty substantial one?" wondered Clen.

"Come down and I'll show you," cried the girl.

Clen followed her into the depths of the cavern and down the ladder in the darkness. He could hear the girl's suppressed breathing just ahead of him.

He shuddered for he saw now that if she had a mind she could stick a knife into him without any trouble and end his life and take his bank roll into the bargain.

"I wonder if I am a fool to be here with this girl," thought Clen.

Just then he looked up above him where at the top of the ladder there was a circle of light showing where the entrance to the cavern was.

In the light as in a frame he saw the face of Olancho, The Spear, framed in the circle of the day.

A second later all was darkness above as the huge rock that had been pulled back from the entrance by the girl snapped back into place under the force of the arms of the Indian husband, who thus took his revenge upon his white wife, in true Indian fashion.

"There's no way of opening the cavern from the inside," shrieked Adele. "We are buried alive in Thunderbolt Cavern by my jealous husband!"

CHAPTER XI.

WILD DOG'S RUSE.

The circling process between the disguised Dix Squire and Wild Dog, the Chipewyan Indian, continued for some time.

Then Wild Dog, who had been puzzling why he was always breaking in a circle here and there in his pursuit of his prey, woke up.

"By dam," he muttered. "Injun no chase! I be chased by white man. Ugh!"

He quickly hit upon a ruse to find out.

Instead of following the tracks of the white man he shinned up a tree and waited.

In half an hour Dix came by still in his disguise of Short Card Tommy and quite as promptly as an arrow, Wild Dog jumped at the back of the white man from his tree, for he saw in a moment that it was up to him to kill the man who suspected him, before he had got back to the safety of Herschel Island.

Wild Dog, however, found that he was facing a man quite as cunning as he.

The white man when he saw in the twinkling of an eye that Wild Dog was jumping at him, by the shadow cast by the Indian from the tree, stepped aside and quick as a flash let Wild Dog land on his feet in the path instead of on the white man's back.

The white fist shot out.

It hit the red man on the center of his nose.

Wild Dog's head hit the earth first.

His feet came along afterward.

But he was game.

In a moment he was up and rushing at his enemy like a man bereft of his senses.

The charge was met by Dix Squire in a wonderful way.

Wild Dog charged with head down, crouching to escape the fist of Dix.

Dix made no attempt to meet the attack with his fists.

Instead his attitude suggested that he was going to close with the Indian and as the Indian was the stronger of the two men the issue of such a closing in was easy to be seen.

The Indian thought this was his chance to win and in his blind rage did not appear to think of his weapons.

But a change came over matters in the next half second.

Dix's knee shot up.

It caught the Indian full on his face.

The upward impulse of the white man's knee, gave it a terrible force.

It struck the red man exactly in the mouth.

Crunch! Came the sound of the impact.

Blood, teeth, and flesh seemed to melt under the stroke.

Wild Dog with a shuddering groan fell backward and lay senseless, his blood running fast, and his face a gory sight.

"Now, you red devil," grinned Dix. "Seems to me I have shown you how."

Dix pulled out his hunting knife, calmly cut half a dozen thongs from the deer-skin jacket of Wild Dog, and then as calmly proceeded to bind him until he was safe and fast.

Dix picked up the insensible Wild Dog, and with about the same ceremony he would accord a load of hay flung the Indian over his back and carried him along a short space.

"You lay there. I'll come back for you in a second," growled Dix as he dropped Wild Dog alongside of the trail.

Soon Dix returned with one of the "hosses" which he and Clen had ridden.

The two animals had been "staked out" at the end of a long rope where the brutes could swing to plenty of bunch grass and fodder, and being of the hardy variety of North-West horses had been in fine shape all the time.

"Come here you thug," muttered Dix as he loaded Wild Dog on to the horse and jumped up behind.

Immediately afterward any one looking might have seen the remarkable spectacle of a white man, trotting on a fine horse along a narrow North-West trail with the insensible body of an Indian, whose face and form were steeped in blood, before him which the white man grasped with intense care.

It was this strange sight that late at night people at Herschel Landing saw.

In the offing shone Herschel Island, looking green and cool in the summer air.

Behind the point of the island, not a mile away, rode the *Arctic Star* at anchor.

"Good," muttered Dix to himself. "There's the ship! Now for a canoe."

Dix knew where one was secreted.

In a few moments more he was bounding over the billows at top speed with the face of Wild Dog blinking at him, the Indian having regained consciousness some time before.

"Ugh! Where go?" asked the Indian, still slightly wool-gathering.

"Oh, I'm going to hang you before long," easily answered Dix. "You'll never get a chance to try to kill another white man. You're as good as a dead Injun."

"Ugh!" cried Wild Dog.

"Lo! the poor Indian!" remarked Dix as he whirled the canoe to the ship and hailed the craft.

"Ship, ahoy!" cried Dix.

"Canoe ahoy. Who are you?" came the answering hail from the boat.

Then a delighted cry echoed over the waters.

"It's Clen Slade—no taint, it's Dix Squire," shouted the delighted voice of Cap'n Nat Poole. "Come aboard quick! For thunder's sake whar've ye been?"

Ten seconds later Dix was once more aboard the *Arctic Star*.

The Indian thug was triced up in the ship's brig wondering when he was to be executed for he firmly thought that his days were numbered.

In the cabin Dix was telling Cap'n Nat all that had happened to him and to Clennam Slade.

The two men had much to tell each other.

Dix's regret was extreme over the death of the two men, John Pomert and Tom Grannis.

"The cable was pinched by the Olancho—Vattemare gang," Dix promptly said. "Let's go and see that Injun and find out."

When Wild Dog saw the two white men approaching he was quickly resigned to his fate.

"Say, why did Olancho steal aboard the ship last winter when we were in winter quarters here," asked Dix, "and pinch my rope and best harpoon?"

"How you know that?" asked Wild Dog, his beady little eyes twinkling.

"I know."

"He say you no tumble. He need rope. See? He need harpoon. See? You goin' home. See?"

"Oh yes, I see," answered Dix.

"Say, do you know that stealing cost the lives of two of my men," cried Cap'n Nat. "I'd ought to hang you high as that yard arm there!"

The Indian looked at Cap'n Nat as if he had been some new kind of an animal of an interesting variety. But in no way did he appear to understand or be especially interested in what was being asserted.

"You fellers hev been doin' all the stealin' about

hyar fer many yars," added Cap'n Nat. "I'm going ter hev ye tell me thet, eh?"

Still Wild Dog said nothing.

But his silence gave consent and affirmation to his words.

"Never mind the brute," said Dix. "Let him go. He isn't going to run away just yet. Get me the cartridges, get some of the boys together and let's go back quick. I'm pretty well alarmed about Clen as it is. He's alone in that gang of outlaws who will take his life in a minute if they thought they dared to do it, for all they are a little afraid of Clen, and that gal's getting dead in love with him."

Cap'n Nat roared.

"Clen was allus a masher," the Cap'n cried. "Now tell us yer plan. Did ye know thet ef ye hadn't hove in sight as ye did thet I'd been arter ye termorrer? We fellers jest was gettin' reddy. Them two sailors' deaths has made us all feel like shootin' up some one an' them bandits was what we was arter right off the reel—wall, never mind. Git ter th' plan."

"My plan is simple. I'm going to go back on the hoss and take the cartridges. I'll swear that I found them on a feller I robbed, or something like that."

"Yass! Make it out a crimer ter git em off me, eh?"

"Possibly. Then when I start you take ten of the boys and yourself and you only be a few minutes behind me. See?"

"Yep."

"Then when you hear two shots one on top of the other, that will be my signal to start."

"Good game! Then we are to come in and clean up the gang."

"Not by a good sight. You are to——"

The remainder of the sentence was so confidential that not a single word could possibly be overheard.

At the end of ten minutes' whispering the voice of Cap'n Nat could be heard raised in great laughter.

"It's th' slickest plot I ever hearn," he cried. "You fellers know how ter put up games. Say, ain't it great?"

In the same spirit of delight Dix rubbed his hands.

"Better start at once," he said. "You get the boys together. Only ten besides yourself, eh?"

"All right! I'll pick out ten o' th' boys, wit Middlebrook and Bill Acton and the rest the best o' th' boys in th' crew. I'll leave Sol Jones in charge of the ship, eh?"

"Sol is second mate and Middlebrook is first mate—yes, Sol will be just the man. Instruct him not to weigh anchor but await us here. We may need the ship soon t' get out to sea as soon as we clean up the gang—will you attend to the shore part of the plot, while I get the boys in line, and provisioned up for the trip? We may be gone a week."

In a few moments a small boat put off from the ship's side and soon it was on its way to Herschel Island with Cap'n Nat on board to arrange there the still unfinished part of the plot outlined by Dix.

Dix watched the Cap'n until that doughty seaman was well toward shore.

Then he thoughtfully leaned over the side of the ship and watched the sparkling waters for a long time.

Soon he called a sailor to him, and the astonishing scene was displayed of a sailor throwing good provisions by the barrel over the ship's side.

In a few moments the dark, peculiar looking fins of many man-eating sharks began to appear to enjoy the feast so unexpectedly given them.

Dix sauntered aft and began talking with Wild Dog. He questioned the Indian bandit for quite a time.

Then as he sauntered away, not having gotten much information from the thug, he apparently accidentally dropped his knife alongside of the Indian.

A stealthy red hand grasped it while a gleaming Indian eye was seen to flash in joy.

Dix walked aft.

His muttered command brought all of the sailors aft to where he stood.

Dix slowly and with infinite detail began telling what was expected of the ten men to be chosen to go with him back to the outlaw's home.

Soon Wild Dog had done what Dix expected him to do.

He had rid himself of his bonds.

The Indian waited until the circulation in his cramped limbs was at its normal state.

Then with a bound he leaped to the rail of the ship and took a long header into the smiling sea.

A loud cry escaped a sailor who had seen the Indian's leap for escape.

"Look!" the sailor yelled. "There goes Wild Dog!"

"I see," replied Dix with a grave nod. "Now look!"

The Indian took but few strokes when a stealthy fin began to cut the water in his direction.

"A shark!" cried a sailor. "There! He's got him!"

There was a wild whirling of arms, a cry of agony, a deepening whirlpool and Wild Dog had disappeared while a bloody foam arose and drifted about on the place where he had been.

"The sharks got him!" whispered a sailor.

"Well, any way, we didn't have to hang him. I doubt whether we would have had the legal right to hang him. He richly deserved dancing at the yard arm on thin air, but after all I'm obliged to those sharks."

"Hully gee!" said the sailor who had assisted Dix in throwing over the shark attracting provisions. "I'd hate ter hev Dix Squire git arter me."

"Any way," thought Dix, "Wild Dog won't go back to see his outlaw friends unless he goes as a ghost."

CHAPTER XII.

OLANCHO'S REVENGE.

In a second Clen Slade, *alias* Rattlesnake Hank, had pulled a match from his pocket and had twisted up a sort of torch from twigs, grass and broken tree bits that strewed the interior of the cave.

"Hubby seems to have it in for wifey," he sneered.

"But wifey will get hunk with hubby," the girl cried her eyes flashing.

"This looks like a plant," continued Clen.

"It is! The Indian lord of mine followed us here and he saw us go down into the cavern. Then he started in to shut us in here."

"He did it all right!"

"Yes. He certainly has us imprisoned."

"What are we to do?"

"Dunno."

"Can't we open the rock on this side of the cavern?"

"Impossible!"

"Is there no other way out?"

"I never knew of any. I don't think there is."

But when Clen thought of the hole in the roof of the cavern he was not so sure that there was not any way out.

But he determined not to let the girl see how he felt.

He made up his mind that he would try her out to see whether she was in any conspiracy to hold him up in the cavern with her husband.

"Nice hubby you have, Adele," he remarked.

"You bet! I'll attend to him if we get out—say, there isn't much chance for our elopement to come off."

Rattlesnake Hank smiled.

"Not so any one would notice it. No, but there's one thing that *will* come off."

"What's that?"

"The stage-coach robbery."

"Can't see why."

"Why can't you?"

"You are here aren't you?"

"Yes."

"I'm here ain't I?"

"No question of it."

"Wild Dog is—ah, off on a secret mission for my father."

Rattlesnake Hank did not smile. He shrewdly guessed that the man was after his side-partner, the whilom Short Card Tommy, but he knew if he was that Tommy, when he changed his disguise and became himself, Dix Squire, would just about make things hum for the Indian Wild Dog.

"I'm better five to one that Wild Dog never comes back," thought the man.

"W-e-e-l! Then there's your dad," put in the disguised whaler.

"My dad," laughed Adele. "Say, what could he do? Say, he's too blind to shoot straight almost. He'd know better than to hold up the coach if there was a million aboard it, instead of what there is."

"Then you and I must hold it up."

"Not *us* but *you*," cried the girl. "The bargain is that we are to be out of it, you know—I mean our gang."

"That's so. We are pretty well out of it buried alive down here."

"True!"

"However, I'm of the opinion that the coach will be held up just the same."

"By whom?"

"By your dearly beloved husband."

Adele gave a shrill shriek and said things in a most unladylike way.

"If he dares I'll cut his heart out—but he will," she wailed. "All that money to go to that thieving Injun. What did I marry him for?"

Rattlesnake Hank turned away to hide his amusement.

"Say," he said. "I'm going to get out of here."

"How?" asked Adele.

"Oh, never mind!"

"What a provoking man!"

"What a provoking girl!"

"How do you make that out?"

"By the remarkable ease with which you keep the truth from me. How about the mystery of this cavern?"

"Mystery?"

"That's what I said."

"There's no mystery here—excepting you."

"I'm no mystery. I'm the most transparent thing you ever saw."

"Well, then get busy and tell me why you're talking in riddles."

Before an answer came Rattlesnake Hank busied himself in making a tiny fire in the center of the cavern.

"What you trying to do, smother us?"

"No danger."

"You bet there's danger."

"I don't believe it."

"I do."

"Why?"

"Because if you build a smoky fire in a tightly shut room some one's got to smother."

Rattlesnake Hank made no reply. He continued to cover up moss with dry sticks, dry sticks with other dry sticks and soon had quite a pile in the center of the cavern.

"It's damp and chill down here," he remarked casually. "I guess I'll light a fire."

"Then here's where we smother!"

Rattlesnake Hank made no reply. He lighted part of his pile of fuel and sent a shower of sparks up into the air and toward the gloomy vault of the immense cavern.

Adele shrugged her shoulders. She expected every moment that there would be a stifling smoke in the cavern. Instead the roaring like distant thunder seemed to die down. This surprised her for the strange noises had been the reason for the cavern having been called *Thunderbolt Cavern* she knew; yet not only was the cavern not filled with smoke, but the noises had also ceased.

"This surprises me," the girl cried. "I never thought it possible that the noises would cease."

Rattlesnake Hank smiled grimly.

"Look here," he said. "I want you to confess how you frightened people by the picture of the spectres here in this cavern."

Adele gave one great gasp of surprise. Her face grew white.

"How did you know anything about the cavern?" she asked.

"From the Eskimos."

"Oh!"

"Were you the ghosts?"

The girl showed her teeth.

"Not all—only one. I say, did you ever see us busy?"

Rattlesnake Hank nodded.

"When?"

"Last performance."

"Oh! Where were you?"

"Looking down the hole up there through which you see the smoke and flame eddying and where after the fire escapes we are going to climb too and get out."

There was added interest in Rattlesnake Hank, when the girl's eyes followed his pointing finger to the top of the cavern out of which the smoke was pouring.

"There's a hole there, isn't there?" she said. "Quite a sizeable one. I'm glad, for you see I weight one hundred and thirty pounds, and there you are!"

"I can crawl through a mighty small hole to save my life."

"There are others," cried the girl. "Say, I'm going

to tell you all about this gang and what we did to keep straggling Injuns and superstitious whites away from us."

"Yes. Go on."

"At certain seasons of the year up here just before the aurora begins there's atmospheric conditions that *always* make the sun look as if it was a great many times its ordinary size and there's usually a black spot in the center that makes it look like a hand grasping a dagger."

"Is that a fact?"

"It is. I noticed that years after years for I was born up here. So, when dad grew older and things began to look bluer, for an old outlaw can't keep younger outlaws off of his game, I faked up this story of the *Spectre of Thunderbolt Cavern*."

"Who's the spectre?"

"I am."

"Oh!"

"Yes. I'm a healthy young spectre too! Well, I let that story trickle out to the Eskimos, the gun-men, the outlaws and the bad-men up here."

"I understand."

"We were free."

"The other band wagon chaps kept away?"

"Yes."

"You did all your pirating alone?"

"Yes."

"Then what?"

"I had found this cavern with the wind that roars through it like a thunderbolt and do you know what I did?"

"No."

"I lured a party of Eskimos here, and got them to look into the cavern. Then I rigged up that little comedy of the ghosts and the bloody figure in the center, and the shining faces all around."

"How did you do it?"

"I was the bloody figure all in white. The multitude around me was merely a lot of dummy figures rubbed in phosphorus. The ghostly light was salt and alcohol burned in a corner by Olancho—that's all there was to it. When I showed it to the Eskimos by the peek system, of looking in to the door, they ran, and I guess most of them are still running. Of course they told all there was to it to every one they ever heard of, and the Eskimos in turn told the white men and the white men came over in certain seasons when I could work the dagger in the sun game and my ghostly game together."

"All told it worked."

"Finest thing you ever saw. Well, that's all except at the present time in this cavern are a lot of furs, general plunder of our gang. It's valuable but it's hard to get it converted into cash."

Rattlesnake Hank was no fool.

Here was his chance. He felt sorry for the girl. He knew she was in a bad environment. He thought of a plan to clean up some easy money.

"Where's the stuff?" he asked. "If you people can't get it out of the territory me and my pal Short Card Tommy may be able to."

The girl led the man to one side of the cavern. There in the half light from the bonfire, was a pile of furs, peltries of all kinds of animals. There was whalebone, general cordage, and merchandise of goodly quantity. There was a ship load of stuff.

"I'll take the loot for my bank roll," Rattlesnake Hank said quickly.

"How much is that?" asked the girl with brightening eyes.

"Ten thousand dollars."

The girl thought a long while.

"Tell you what I'll do with you," she said. "If you'll get me out of the territory with the old man, it's a pop! We've got some cash back in the United States in bank. See?"

Rattlesnake Hank nodded.

"Whereabouts?"

"In St. Louis."

"Well, I'll tell you. If I get you out of here safe, set you and your dad on two good horses and give you ten thou' will you kick the trail for St. L.?"

"Sure as you're a foot high—and say, will I see you in St. L.?"

"That remains to be seen," said Rattlesnake Hank, with a laugh. "I may get riddled with shot when I hold up the coach."

Adele turned away so that her face could not be seen.

"Never mind," she said after a second. "This comes from marrying an Injun."

Without a word Rattlesnake Hank climbed up the rounding sides of the cavern.

Soon he assisted Adele up the craggy steep.

With very little labor he and the girl stood in the moonlight.

The girl had on now a white dress. It was her ghostly outfit.

"What are you going to do with that?" asked Rattlesnake Hank.

"Wait," she said.

The tramp of a horse could be heard coming down the trail over which the hill topped in which was the cavern.

"It's about time my dear hubby came by," said Adele vindictively.

She fixed herself where, as the horse came around the bend in the trail facing her, its rider would be sure to see her.

Soon Olancho of the Spear came into sight.

He stopped his horse, which pranced and danced about at the ghostly figure above him.

Adele like a ghost danced and waved hither and thither.

Her white hand pointed at her husband. Her face seemed set and death-like.

As he had shut the girl in the cavern Olancho was sure he was seeing the corpse of his wife.

Adele spoke.

"This is your last ride," a solemn voice sounded.

Even Rattlesnake Hank jumped. At first he did not identify the voice as being that of Adele.

But whether Olancho did or not no one knows.

The Indian bolted on his horse back on the trail at breakneck speed as if Old Nick was after him.

"Well, I'm shy an Indian husband," the girl smiled. "Hope to see you in St. Louis. I'll get to the horses as you directed. Dad and I will get off immediately."

Incidentally this was the last seen of Adele and Kayamon Vattemare the leaders of the Midnight Assassins in the vicinity of Herschel Island or anywhere else!

The loot that Clen purchased with the famous bank roll returned him four for one.

In the loot was found the original cable and the harpoon, the lack of which had cost the *Arctic Star* the worthy lives of two of its crew.

When he saw the missing rope Clen wondered if he ought not to have felt it his duty to bring the father and daughter to justice—but justice seems so far away in the wilds of the North-West.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HOLD-UP COMES OFF.

In a nook hidden from prying eyes of Indian or white, Rattlesnake Hank now once more in his garb of Clen Slade, and Dix Squire, who had also cast aside his masquerading suit of Short Card Tommy, was busily engaged in getting ready for the camp they had planned.

"So Wild Dog was fed to the sharks?" remarked Clen. "It was a deserved fate!" It seems to me that the Devil has recovered his own."

"How about your friend Adele and Pop Vattemare?" reminded Dix.

"They've gone."

"Gone?"

"Yes."

"Gone where?"

"To St. Louis."

"What?"

"That's the town they headed for."

"W-h-y, how did that come about?"

"It was due to me, I guess."

"Due to you—did you let them escape?"

"Not only did I let them escape but I put them in possession of good horses to carry them at least part way down the trail—say, have you got any money?"

Dix stared at Clen.

"Got an money?" he repeated. "Say, did the girl get to your bank roll all right?"

"She did. I'm flat broke."

Dix broke into a merry fit of laughter.

"You are the funniest ever," he said. "To think that you after all your talk let the girl touch you up for your cash. C-h-u-m-p! That's the way they spell it, eh?"

"Oh, I don't know."

"You don't know—oh, I see. You're keeping back something. Very good! Now cough up."

"While I gave the girl the roll she gave me the best end of it for the roll."

"I suppose so."

"In fact for that bank roll, I bought of her all the loot of her dad, and believe me, it's worth a great deal more than I paid for it."

Dix opened his eyes wide.

"Bought stolen goods, eh? Receiver of stolen goods? We-ll! You're the limit I say!"

"I must say I didn't look at it that way. My plan is to keep the loot together, advertise for owners of what we have found of the loot and salvage the remainder."

"Good plan, perhaps, but it's like when a bank fails. Every blooming chump in a town stops paying bills claiming he lost in the failure whether he ever had a cent in the bank or not."

"Now don't you worry. I'd let all the stuff go except the most enormous piles of whalebone, some of it fifty years old, that I saw—no one can possibly claim that much, for probably a lot of it was gotten honestly and in that whalebone alone, boy, I've got back my money and big interest."

"Darned Shylock!" cried Dix.

"Not a bit of it. That girl could never have realized anything much on the stuff. Her father was old, out of the outlaw game. Her husband is at best only a thieving Indian. Wild Dog is dead—what could she do?"

"Why did you not remember the stern arms of the law that ought to trap her? Did her bright eyes make you forget your duty?"

"Come away! Duty out here is rather mixed. The standards here in this civilization and out in the wilds is different; besides what I started to do was to get the Vattermare cash and pelf, and drive the gang to cover—I did it and there's only one thing that we have to do."

"What's that?"

"Get Olancho of the Spear, so that girl would be left free of an impossible husband when she gets to St. Louis."

"Don't let that worry you. She'll forget him quick enough when some chap looms up in St. Louis. Are you going to St. Louis?"

Clen aimed a kick at Dix.

"Not this week. No! I don't expect ever to see Adele again."

Dix grinned.

"Stop grinning like a monkey in a zoo. Where are the boys?"

"All fixed up."

"Is everything ready?"

"You bet!"

"Have you taken care as to the details?"

"That's just what I did."

"Things all right on the ship?"

"Fine! Steam's up. Soon as we get back we are to sail."

"How many men did you bring?"

"Ten, 'sides self and Cap'n Nat."

"Nat came, eh?"

"You bet! Where there might be fighting there's to be found one Cap'n Nat Poole commander of the good whaling vessel the *Arctic Star*."

"That's sure right. Well let us see what we do see."

"That's the ticket. Come on. Let's wind up the ball of yarn of Olancho, the Spear."

"Here's where Mr. Adele gets his!"

* * * * *

In the depths of the forest not a mile away from the conference between Dixon Squire and Clennam Slade a band of Indians were in the same deep pow-wow.

The fierce face of Olancho was the center of the group.

The men were all vagrant Chipewyans and were from different points of the territory having been called to where they were talking by the underground methods that makes Indians far separated suddenly get together.

By this underground Olancho had invited the band of six to a "killing" of a financial kind.

Every man in the place was a thug and outlaw whose reputation was of the worst kind, and whose deeds of blood were worse absolutely than their reputation.

In fact one could have scraped the region with a fine-toothed comb and not got a harder bunch of red devils than the men here present.

Every man was armed to the teeth. Revolvers glistened by the side of knives in every belt. Rifles were many. All the weapons were of the best possible kind and all had a "business" air about them that warranted that they would give a good account of themselves.

The band was talking in the Indian language.

"Why you send for us, Olancho," asked one big fellow, whose face was scarred and seamed and whose coppery-color showed that he was a half-breed Chipewyan.

"Big thing in air."

"What?"

"Know stage-coach?"

"One running from Herschel Landing?"

"Yep."

"Sure."

"Coach come down to-morrow."

"Whyfor?"

"Big treasure trip."

"Oh."

"Lot money on board."

"How much?"

"Dunno. Hear hund' thou' dollar."

"Woof! That big mon'."

"Sure is!"

"How you get mon'?"

"Hold up coach."

"We hol' up coach?"

"Yep."

"I dunno—danger'us."

"Wot dat? If we get cash no never work more; if we get keel, no never work more. Ugh!"

This point of view appeared to appeal to the other Indian braves for about the listening circle ran many words of admiration at the remarks passed by Olancho.

"No mon', better be dead," said Chief Jack, a fat, great, wiry, hard-looking fellow.

"Ugh!" growled the chorus.

The noble red men knew the pinch of cashless life, it would appear from their general attitude toward things.

Chief Jack next questioned Olancho as to his plans.

"How you hold up coach?" asked Chief Jack.

"Much easy," replied Olancho.

"I like to know," said Chief Jack.

"Ugh!" grunted the chorus of Indians.

"This away," added Olancho. "We all git masks. Like white men."

"Ugh!" grunted the chorus.

"We all git on hosses."

"Ugh!" grunted the crowd like the chorus in a Greek tragedy.

"We go White Horse Pass."

"Ugh!"

"Then we git where ribber one side, wit rapids."

"Ugh!"

"Odder side is s-t-e-e-p mountains."

"Ugh."

"Then wen coach come r-a-t-t-l-i-n-g down steep grade, I jump out of bushes so——"

Olancho imitated a bandit stepping out of a forest with a rifle at his shoulder aimed at a stage-coach driver.

"Han's up!" Olancho said.

A chorus of applause was just what the chap needed to excite him still more and he secured it in many doses.

Olancho then gave a correct imitation of a bandit rifling the treasure box of a stage-coach and then his audience broke into many Indian words expressive of their glee.

"Dat good," cried Chief Jack. "We hit in with you—wow!"

The "ughs" that ran around the circle of warriors

showed that the entire party was with the leader, Olancho.

"How about divvy?" asked Chief Jack.

"Easy. Each man gets like share," cried Olancho. That settled it.

Golden dreams came before each mind.

No longer any work, nor poverty, nor care—no longer anything!

One garish drunk in far off settlements for each Indian; one long series of luxurious days with assimilated congresses of wives—plenty to eat, drink, and smoke—oh, what a good thing was that coach for all!

Olancho himself was immensely pleased.

He saw how nice life was to be without his white wife.

"Injun wife fer Injun," he muttered. "White wife no heap good."

In fact the Indian was as heartily sick of Adele as the girl was of him.

The forest romance was no longer a romance.

But with Indian superstition Olancho brooded deeply over the wraith of his wife, and her warning "This is your last ride."

Olancho firmly believed that his wife had reappeared to him after her death because he could not conceive how she possibly could escape from the cavern.

"I shut up gal and Rattlesnake Hank t'gedder," he said to himself. "They like each other comp'ny. Now they stay there in cavern. Starve death long 'go tank goodness."

The Indian chuckled when he thought of the torments he had placed upon his wife.

"I beat dat wife-ghost," he cunningly added. "It say, 'you Olancho, this is your last ride.' Olancho no ride dis treep. He walk. No ghost get by dat, what?"

This was the scheme that the Indian had hit upon to "beat" the ghostly warning.

The Spectre of Thunderbolt Cavern did not appeal to this red-man.

The remainder of the day was passed in the work of getting all in readiness for the attack upon the treasure laden coach which was due to pass through the dangerous point selected for the hold-up by Olancho in the early evening of the same day.

There was a great furbishing up of weapons, trying on of war habiliments, for no Indian buck would care to attempt such a serious business to them of the actual holding up of a white-man's coach, and robbing it of its treasure, unless it was done in full Indian war-paint.

The Chipewyan war-paint was added to each face.

The copper-colored faces soon became fierce with bright color. Each war garb was three red stripes across the face at intervals.

The naked bodies, for each Indian stripped to his waist, were, also, striped in red, the color of blood, and the sable strip of death.

Some of the Indians put, on their polar bear-claw necklaces; others teeth of bears, or bits of elk horns.

Each emblem indicated that the personal bravery of the Indian had gained the coveted trophy.

Chief Jack wore his fine quill war-bonnet!

They were a savage, motley gang, terrifying, after all, for every change in dress indicated that each savage nature was getting crueller and more blood-thirsty, and more savage.

When the band was all tuned up for war it was a fighting man's band of Indian braves and could only be stopped by plenty of cartridges.

"Now time go," cried Olancho all in the glories of his war-paint.

But while all the others rode their Indian ponies Olancho walked.

His pony was led by one of the others of the party.

About a quarter of a mile from the scene the entire gang led their ponies into the sheltering woods and Olancho, as general of the motley horde led the men into a thicket where the horses were tied in a place of concealment.

Then the Indians were scattered in the bushes around the hill or mountain side.

Their orders were not to shoot unless they heard Olancho shoot.

But when he howled, "Hold up your hands" in true border fashion to the stage-coach driver as he rattled up, the Indians were asked to rise up and give their intimidating war-cry, then shake their weapons at the coach and sink back to shelter until Olancho gave the cry of the hawk, when Chief Jack and one other Indian, was to step forward and aid in carrying off the treasure box.

The box was to be opened; the gold dust and bullion it contained was to be transferred to sacks, each Indian of a stipulated number was to be responsible for each sack, and the entire band purposed to ride into the forest fastness where a division was to be made immediately and each man rush off to his own hiding place.

"Never find us; never touch us," argued Olancho.

"Sure not," growled Chief Jack.

Hardly had the party gotten secreted when the rattle of the coach coming along at good speed could be heard around the bend of the road about a mile off.

"All ready!" cried Olancho. "Get on masks."

There was a hurry to put on trifling little masks in true white man's fashion although as a matter of fact none were needed; the obscuring lines of war-paint was enough of a disguise for each red face.

The coach came swaying around into view.

It soon was opposite the ambushed warriors.

Olancho with rifle at his shoulder stepped into view.

"Hold up han's!" he shrieked as he covered a figure

on the box of the coach with his weapons. "Or I'll blow ye ter th' Arctic Ocean!"

The coach stopped like a flash.

Every warrior in concealment jumped up and flourished his weapon, and gave the fearsome war-cry of the Indians.

Crash!

There then came this sound from the rifles of twelve men.

The shots went with deadly aim at each of the yelling warriors.

Olancho riddled with bullets sank a huddled heap in the road, stone dead.

The other shots cut into ribbons every warrior that had shown himself.

A few wounded, and frightened nearly to death, crawled to their horses and sped away.

But only a few left the battlefield. The rest lay dead as the result of the plot of Clen Slade and Dix Squire.

For the coach was filled with the brawny sailors of the Arctic Star.

A regular coach had been "planted" with men from the ship, all armed to the teeth, and when they had been held up as they knew they would be by Olancho and his Indian band of thugs, they had poured into the surprised ranks of the outlaws a deadly hail of bullets.

Olancho of the Spear, if he had not ridden, had walked to his death, after all.

"We cleaned out the outlaw gang!" cried Clen Slade as he looked around with his calm smile on the battlefield.

"Hurrah!" yelled the brawny sailors of the *Arctic Star*.

"Hurrah!" yelled Dix Squire. "We are now Homeward Bound!"

THE END.

The next issue will be

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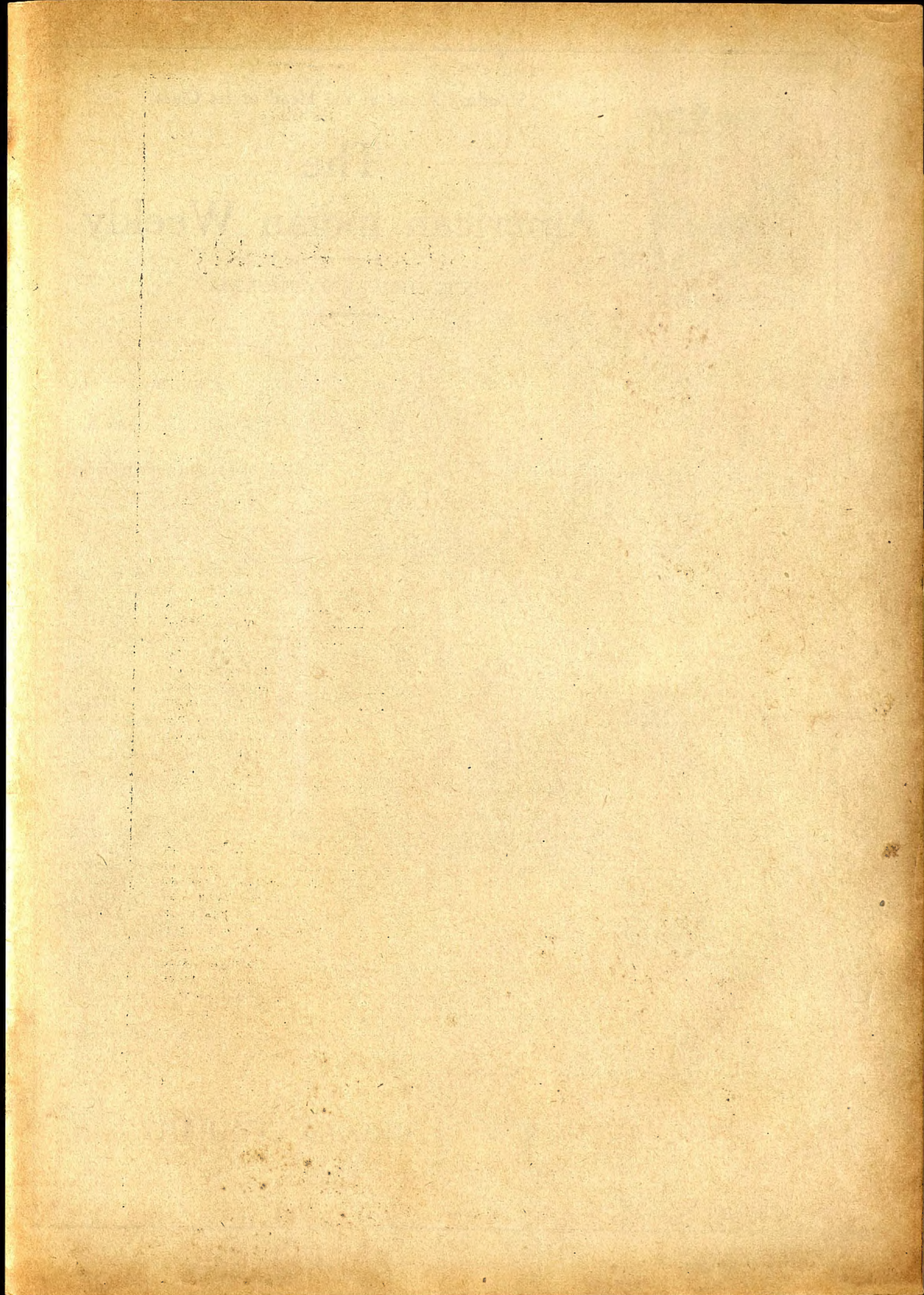
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| No. 1. | THE OUTLAW'S PLEDGE | or The Raid on the Old Stockade |
| No. 2. | TRACKED TO HIS LAIR | or The Pursuit of the Midnight Raider |
| No. 3. | THE BLACK DEATH | or The Curse of the Navajo Witch |
| No. 4. | THE SQUAW MAN'S REVENGE | or Kidnapped by the Piutes |
| No. 5. | TRAPPED BY THE CREES | or Tricked by a Renegade Scout |
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| No. 10. | THE MIDNIGHT ALARM | or The Raid on the Paymaster's Camp |
| No. 11. | THE MASKED RIDERS | or The Mystery of Grizzly Gulch |
| No. 12. | LURED BY OUTLAWS..... | or The Mounted Ranger's Desperate Ride |

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| February | 23—No. 13. | STAGE COACH BILL'S LAST RIDE..... | or The Bandits of Great Bear Lake |
| March | 2—No. 14. | THE TRAGEDY OF HANGMAN'S GULCH..... | or The Ghost of Horn Mountains |
| March | 9—No. 15. | THE TREASURES OF MacKENZIE ISLES..... | or The Outlaw's Drag-Net |
| March | 16—No. 16. | HELD UP AT SNAKE BASIN..... | or The Renegade's Death-Vote |
| March | 23—No. 17. | THE MAIL RIDER'S DASH WITH DEATH..... | or The Desperado of Poker Flat |
| March | 30—No. 18. | THE RED MASSACRE..... | or The Hold-Up Men of Barren Lands |
| April | 6—No. 19. | THE MYSTERY OF THE ARCTIC CIRCLE..... | or The Robbers' Round-Up |
| April | 13—No. 20. | HOUNDED BY RED MEN..... | or The Road Agents of Porcupine River |
| April | 20—No. 21. | THE FUR TRADER'S DISCOVERY..... | or The Brotherhood of Thieves |
| April | 27—No. 22. | THE SMUGGLERS OF LITTLE SLAVE LAKE..... | or The Trapper's Vengeance |
| May | 4—No. 23. | NIGHT RIDERS OF THE NORTHWEST..... | or The Vigilantes' Revenge |
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